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# THE OLD TREE BLOSSOMED

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THE SHOUT OF THE KING  
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# THE OLD TREE BLOSSOMED

*A Realistic Romance*

BY  
ERNEST RAYMOND

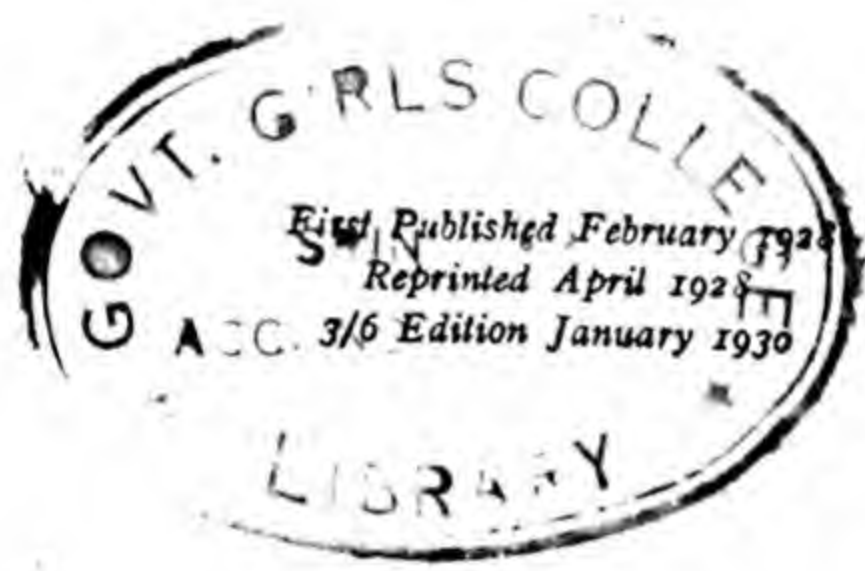


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To  
PATRICK ERNEST RAYMOND  
while he is still a tourney-knight



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PART I  
*THE TWO WORLDS*



## CHAPTER I

### *Mrs. Gallimore Comes Home*

#### I

WHEN Mrs. Gallimore, from her corner seat in the omnibus, saw the old gentleman standing under the fretful gaslight of the lamp-post and brandishing his umbrella at the driver, she resolved that if the driver responded to this appeal, she would take advantage of the halt and descend. And it fell that the driver had compassion on the old gentleman standing there in the rain, and drew in his horses with a "Woah!—Come—*Damn you!*—Stop, *will* yer, I say!" The bus halted, and the animals steamed. Immediately Mrs. Gallimore picked up from the floor a string-bag filled with parcels, gathered up her skirt behind her, for the floor was muddy, and sidled between the ungracious knees of the passengers to the door. It was not, you must understand, that she was eager to leave the bus; its seat had been too restful after her walking and standing in the shops, and its oil lamps had lulled her into pensiveness; it was just that—well, there were two reasons: she wanted to save the horses from being stopped a second time, and, as the bus was full, she had a fancy to give the old gentleman her seat.

The anxious old gentleman was already on the step and seemed a shade impatient when he saw that he would have to evacuate this commanding position if he was to allow a slender, middle-aged woman to alight. He fussed back into the street, holding the bus as tight as a hard-won trophy; and Mrs. Gallimore bowed her gratitude and passed him. He hurriedly recaptured the citadel; the conductor pulled the bell; the horses strained at their



collars to get the lumbering vehicle under way again ; their hoofs rang and slipped on the metalled road, till they mastered it ; and then the bus rumbled away from Mrs. Gallimore, its yellow lights illuminating the slant-wise rain. It carried the old gentleman and all its company to their several histories and left Mrs. Gallimore to walk along Bealing High Street to hers.

She stepped out with her heavy parcels, taking such cover as the awnings of the shops provided. She reached a side-street and turned up it ; two more turnings and she had left behind her the noise of horse-traffic and trams, and the last of the feet of Christmas shoppers ; a third, and she had entered upon Waldron Avenue.

It was deserted beneath the rain, and looked unusually long, as its two rows of lamps, reflected in the wet pavement, ran to meet each other round a distant bend. Behind the lamps the two rows of yellow brick residences, all exactly alike, with their bay windows and tiny patches of privet, stared at each other across the road. Waldron Avenue was the very cheapest of the streets that pretend to elegance : forty-pounds-a-year seemed written on every little two-floored house ; but it was solid and neat, and the sight of it lessened the ache in Mrs. Gallimore's arm. The lights behind its holland or Venetian blinds were always the first that spoke to her of home. No. 33. She turned on to the chequer-board tiles that led to its green front door. No. 33 was her home.

As she entered, a boy of about sixteen appeared for a moment of curiosity round a door that opened on to the passage ; saw that the arrival was his mother ; and returned into the room, quite unstimulated. Mrs. Gallimore went past his door to the kitchen and laid her purchases on the table. She hung her coat and fur boa over a hook on the door, and straightened her hair. Then she called to the boy.

"Is Father home yet, dear ?"

And the boy's voice, coming most palpably from a head bowed over a book, returned :

"No, it's only a quarter to seven."

So Mrs. Gallimore busied herself with preparations for a meal. She looked into the gas-stove where a savoury dish was cooking ; and gathering some cutlery, went into the dining-room to lay the table. Here, on an easy chair—or, rather, over and between its arms—was spread her son, his cheek resting against its back, as a child's might against a maternal breast. Mrs. Gallimore, busying herself with the cloth, glanced more than once at his head and the line of his features. Each year as he had grown taller, that fair hair, that straight nose, that curtain of lashes, that strangely beautiful mouth, had been more and more potent to quicken her heart to extravagant feeling : this—this male creature, so much handsomer than most boys, so much handsomer than his parentage warranted, was Stephen, her *son* ! Going for napkins to the drawer of the sideboard, she looked at her face on its large mirror and watched it smile in a resigned denial : no, there was no excuse for Stephen's beauty there ; her features were not very straight—they never had been ; her nose was slightly nipped and red ; and her hair was fast going grey. Her expression, under its smile, was a little sad, but serenely so. She was fifty ; and if her slender frame suggested less, the lines in her face suggested more.

"Where's little Bob ? " she asked.

"Upstairs, making his tram-car."

"Isn't he cold ? "

"Sure to be."

"Oh, but, Stephen, you shouldn't have let him go and play in an unwarmed room."

"I made him put his overcoat on."

"Poor darling ! "

Bob was her sister's little boy, to whom she was giving a home while his mother was ill. She pictured him in



## THE OLD TREE BLOSSOMED

the chilled atmosphere of the box-room, protected by an overcoat, as he worked at the temporary love of his life.

"Bob," she called at the foot of the stairs.

"Yes, auntie?"

"Aren't you cold, dear?"

"Only my fingers are; and my legs a bit."

"Come down in the warm, darling. Come and help me lay the table. Stephen is too busy."

With a humorous sigh Stephen accepted the reproach and laid down his book. Jumping up, he went to the sideboard and took out the cruets and put them on the table. To a whistled accompaniment he laid the spoons and forks, stressing as each article went to its place the note that synchronized with its dismissal. His mother stole occasional glances at him, and loved him—throbbingly. Stephen was so good to look upon—this reserved, humorous boy who, by concealing his thoughts from all, added distance and mystery to his charm.

Both paused as steps were heard outside the front door, and a key clicked in the lock.

"Here's Joyous Death," said Stephen, and resumed his whistling.

## II

As Mr. Gallimore, tall, plump, and nearing fifty, stood to wipe his muddy boots on the mat, he suddenly bent his head over the work, with the unfortunate result that the rain which had collected in the brim of his bowler ran from its lips to the floor. It splashed there; and Mr. Gallimore was pricked into venting his irritation by the muted utterance of a sacred name. He hoped that no one heard him, for just now he was reading—in fact, he had just finished the book in the train—an historical romance that included Marcus Aurelius and Epictetus in its company, and he was possessed by the desire to appear somewhat Roman: too proud for the display of emotion, too wise to acknow-

ledge adversity with more than an uplifted eyebrow. And here, the first moment a bit of rain shot from his hat, he must needs go and allude to his Saviour ! Exasperating. Disappointing.

For forty years, since, at seven years old, he had read rapturously of the princes in the fairy tales, Mr. Gallimore's heart had thrilled to the perfections of his heroes and heroines, and had strained after a like perfection in himself. That he never attained it was due, not alone to our mortal frailty, but to the fact that his ideal standard varied with the book in hand, and thus there was a change of programme twice a week. Immediately after his marriage, a new emotion joined this old hunger in his soul—an emotion of settled sadness that his wife should fail to attain the ideal wifely pattern ; and he measured her failure by a new canon, with every book that came from the Public Library. And then when Stephen began to grow up and develop a character of his own, how unfavourably it compared, sometimes, with the character of the juvenile lead in the current romance ! Only one thing gave Mr. Gallimore complete satisfaction : Stephen's appearance. It seemed to him that no young hero of literature could transcend his boy in beauty ; and was this not proof of his dearest creed, that the Gallimore blood, poorly though it might be housed to-day, had once been a noble strain ?

“ Are you wet, dear ? ” asked his wife, hurrying out.

Three nights earlier his reply to this same question had been genially sarcastic, because the book in his overcoat pocket held a genially sarcastic hero. “ Oh no, my dear,” he had said. “ The rain in these parts has the peculiar quality of drying one.” But to-night Marcus Aurelius ruled a new empire, in the soul of a city worker, and a multitude of Stoical Romans compassed him about, and Mr. Gallimore replied, “ Oh, it's nothing ” ; and as he said it, the thought that all women were quite incapable of the Stoical wisdom and must always worry



over small irritants, irritated him so much that he added, "A little rain is nothing to get excited about."

"Well, you'd better bring your coat into the scullery," suggested Mrs. Gallimore.

"All right, all right," he protested. Something about her sentence exasperated him still further: its earth-bound remoteness from his loftier thoughts, and the incongruity, when he was feeling attuned to the grandeur of Rome, of being invited into a scullery. He walked after her, however, and when he saw the familiar little scullery, tried not to be worried by its narrowness, its darkness, its sink, and the jam-jar with knives on the window-sill. Having suffered her to remove his soaking coat, he went to the mirror and touched his hair with his hand and straightened the collar and lapels of his blue lounge-coat. A pity that the serge of the jacket was getting shiny in places and its edges beginning to turn outwards like the petals of a rose; a pity that he was obliged to make his shirts last three days and his collars twice; a pity that he was getting fat! The Romans had statuesque bodies, braced by comely exercise, bathed and anointed in luxurious baths, and clad in spotless robes. Were he of such a habit, so clad and so burnished, he would not mind his forty-six years. There was something substantial and dignified about such an age. There was *gravitas*. But the mirror saddened him.

"I think I'll go upstairs and have a wash," said he.

This was not at all a usual step. Usually he went straight from the hall to his chair in the dining-room, where he kicked off his boots, sighed with delight, and if his latest reading had been of some roystering English squires, called out heartily, "Come, feed the brute, my girl, feed the brute! A slice o' beef and a tankard of ale!" But to-night, though damp and tired, he went up to the bathroom in the service of his current ideal. And, climbing the twelve narrow stairs, he thought how difficult it was, in our vile English climate and on his

narrow income of three hundred a year, to vie with those old Romans in the spotlessness of their togas and the scrupulous care of their bodies. In such a sunlight as they enjoyed a toga had been sufficient covering and could be laundered easily ; doubtless they had a clean toga every day. But if there was a cleansing sun, was there not also dust and sweat and dirt ? Why was it that a man could imagine, for his pain, a world more perfect than this in which he had to live ; could long for a character more perfect than he could build ; and could dream of loves and intimacies more perfect than any which came to him. Perhaps this hunger for perfection was proof of a spiritual greatness. In spite of all his flaws, man was bigger than he knew. It comforted Mr. Gallimore. His worrying dissatisfactions were no proof of smallness but of essential greatness. As he turned the handle of the bathroom door he felt this strongly. He was Man, a creature of spiritual possibilities yet uncharted. More than that, he was a last scion of the old crusading Gallimores, and they had been among humanity's cream ; of course the restive Gallimore blood in him must keep him ever dissatisfied. Men's nature was to press forward, urged on by discontent ; and it was a Gallimore's nature to be somewhere in the van of the malcontents.

He was now in the bathroom, and he sighed as the constricted little place showed him, not only a bath and a wash-basin, but also the most private seat in his home.

Which things are the parable.

### III

During supper he was both relieved and irritated : relieved at the cleanness of the table-linen and the polish on the spoons, and irritated by the tiny network of cracks in one of the plates that had been overheated in the oven ; by the worn blades of the knives ; and by a lack of grandeur in his son, Stephen, when he said, " Hoik us



over the greens, Bob." And then he saw the grubbiness of Stephen's hands : and this last insisted on a vent, Roman ablutions being so large a part of his ideal, just now.

"Stephen, will you never learn to take a proper pride in your appearance? You can detect the persons of real refinement instantly by the state they keep themselves at home. Anybody will decorate his person if he's going to be seen by others ; a savage does as much ; but it's the man of real self-respect—and *virtue*, as the Romans would have called it—who cleans himself up, regardless of whether he is seen or not."

Stephen looked up surprised. His father was often finding faults with him—and the angle of the fault-finding seemed to change every few days—but not before had he insisted on his washing and sprucing himself up for supper. The boy turned and glanced at his mother as if for amused sympathy. Mr. Gallimore fired. He had just been reading about the *patria potestas* of Old Rome, the absolute sovereignty of the father in the family. But—but what was he to do now? In his heart of hearts he knew that he was a little afraid of his sixteen-year-old son. Stephen, always a reserved boy, had lately become tall and enigmatic, with the habit of playing a controlled smile about his mouth. Heaven knew how he might take a command to go and wash. But Mr. Gallimore refused to be a craven and to turn back now ; in the service of his ideal he pushed on.

"Go up and wash." He turned to his wife. "Isn't he trained to wash before every meal? It's really your business to look after these things. I can't see to everything."

"He ought to, I suppose," agreed Mrs. Gallimore. "But don't let's have a row."

"Suppose!" snorted Mr. Gallimore, annoyed with himself for having allowed sixteen years of Stephen's life to pass before he discovered this imperative rule of treating every meal with state and ceremony. "A row?"

There's no row. I hate rows—they're contemptible. I'm merely telling him to go and wash."

Stephen did not move.

"Stephen, did you hear what I said? Go and wash."

Stephen looked at his father, and a flush covered his forehead. But it faded out; for a second the smile dawned at his lips, and he answered cheerfully, "They're all right, Father."

"I've just told you they're all wrong. Go up and wash 'em."

Still the boy made no move, and the flush returned to his forehead.

"Go on, I tell you. I never speak twice," said Mr. Gallimore, having just done so four times.

Stephen continued his eating.

"Stephen, I give you thirty seconds to obey."

"Thanks."

The mother looked from one to the other.

"Oh, don't let's have a row. Run, Stephen, if your father says so. It won't take a minute."

"I'm not going to be ordered about like a six-year-old."

In rapid thought Mr. Gallimore measured his own physical strength with that of his growing son. He was an inch or two taller, and much heavier, but Stephen was a dark horse. . . . To a wrestling match there might be an inconclusive issue; and there would certainly be an undignified one. Oh, how stupid it all was! Everything had gone all wrong; he was being the opposite of everything he wanted to be to his son. Why, he loved the boy; if the truth were told, he loved him better than anything else in the world. . . . Still, he must not withdraw now.

"Am I to make you go?"

"I doubt if you could."

"I'll soon show you the answer to that."

He pushed back his chair and rose; Stephen immediately rose too, feeling entitled to commence hostilities



from a position of equal advantage ; Mrs. Gallimore jumped up in alarm ; and little Bob, seeing that everybody else was standing, stood too. All had a sense that they must be appearing rather ridiculous.

There was a pause in the history of the Gallimores. Stephen broke it.

"We look as though we had decided to sing a hymn," suggested he.

"Stephen, don't rile your father. . . . And Robert, don't provoke the boy. He's no longer a child. You hurt him by talking as if he were no older than Bob. He'd obey you, if you'd put things differently, wouldn't you, dear ? "

"Of course," agreed Stephen.

Something in the boy's words produced a complete revulsion in Mr. Gallimore. They were small enough words, to be sure, but they created a new picture—a picture of this handsome boy in perfect sympathy with a father who was more like an elder brother to him than a stern parent. To have the idolising love of this son, every movement of whose mouth did, in secret truth, stir strange, womanish swellings in one's heart ; to have him, perhaps, modelling himself on his father—how much sweeter were these things than Roman reverence and Roman fear ! Mr. Gallimore's heart ached. The boy couldn't love a father who was constantly nagging at him ; he couldn't model himself on a father who had no consistency of character but was a Roman parent to-day, the Last of the Barons yesterday, and would probably be St. Francis of Assisi to-morrow ?

"Well——" he began, and went back to his seat. "Yes, we mustn't quarrel, Stephen. I—I am a little tired and ill-tempered this evening."

He sat down, and Stephen sat down (the victory being apparently his), and Mrs. Gallimore sat down, and Bob, seeing that everything was over, sat down too and got on with a cold potato.

## CHAPTER II

### *Four Dreaming*

#### I

“THE question is, do you think you will like it?” said Mr. Gallimore.

Supper was over, and they were now seated about the fire, the father in his favoured arm-chair, Stephen in the opposite one, and Mrs. Gallimore by the table on which was her basket of socks. Bob was also at work upon the table, having been allowed to bring into the warmth of the dining-room his fretsaw and his inchoate tramcar.

“That’s hardly the question at all,” answered Stephen, but not rudely; people are never rude for an hour or so after a quarrel. “I certainly shan’t like it. The question is, what else is there?”

Mr. Gallimore reflected on this question, and really he couldn’t see that there was anything else. It would be easy to get Stephen this clerkship in the office of which he himself was assistant manager; anything else bristled with difficulties. And since the plan had opened itself before him, it had captured his meandering thoughts like a railway track, compelling them to keep to its lines; if he tried to escape from them, he landed his mind in all sorts of worrying entanglements where, as likely as not, its engines stopped altogether.

“And the answer is, Nothing,” concluded Stephen.

Mrs. Gallimore folded up the completed socks, replaced them in the basket, and took out one of her son’s. She was giving little to the discussion, but thinking a deal. And, to be sure, this had been her attitude for many years now—so the head bent over her sock was thinking.



Let us follow her thoughts and her dream of the future. Years ago she had built an invisible philosophy around her soul and now lived secure in its fastness. It had not always been thus : once upon a time she had lived in the centre of her secret glooms and secret dismays—much as her husband lived now ; and it was part of her philosophy to-day to be grateful for those old glooms, since they had taught her the need of building, and to be grateful that they still tested her wall with their onrush, sometimes, since this made her build it better and repair its cracks. From her redoubt she looked out on unwiser and unhappier people, and loved them.

And the nearest and immeasurably the dearest of that unsheltered multitude were Stephen, her magnificent boy, and good Robert, her well-meaning man. Stephen ! Stephen on the verge of entering into his adult life ! One day, perhaps, she would be able to teach him how to build, but she was too wise to attempt it yet ; it was a lesson that could only be taught on the far side of frustration and pain. Stephen must go on ; she would watch his fight, guard his stores, send him supplies, and when he had adventured far enough and taken blows enough to make him ready for her lesson, she would show him why and how one must build. That was her dream.

She put a new thread of wool into her darning needle, and continued her work, with a bent head, listening.

## II

“ It’s not my fault that there’s nothing else,” said Mr. Gallimore.

“ I know, I know. I ought to have passed the Matric. Then perhaps I could have looked out for something better.”

“ Something *better* ? I began as a junior clerk.”

“ Yes, but——” Stephen stopped ; his compassion buried the words, “ It didn’t carry you very far, did it ? ”

“ Yes, but what ? ”

"Yes, but nothing very much. . . . I never had an earthly of passing the Matric. I believe that one boy once passed it from our school, and I'm sure the Head had a fit when he heard. He's lived on it ever since."

"Well, I couldn't afford to send you anywhere else. And Bealing College isn't such a bad school. You know I'd have sent you somewhere else if I could. I had Harrow in mind when you were first born, if—if any good fortune had come my way."

"Yes, I know," said Stephen, looking at the floor. "I'm not saying it's anyone's fault."

"Well, then, am I to fix it up for you at Leicester's? I—I am not without authority there, and I shall be able to help you, perhaps. And we can lunch together, and travel up and down together."

Stephen stared into the fire, as if he found it difficult to say the word of acceptance. His mother lifted her head and gazed at his profile while he thought.

"Yes," said the boy at last. "It'll be something to start on, any rate. When shall I go?"

"After Christmas, I think. The first of the year'll be a good day to start on. I started on the first of the year."

"Right-ho!"

Stephen picked up his book again. It was "Ivanhoe."

"'If Brian de Bois-Guilbert gain the prize,' said the Prior, 'I will gage my rosary that I name the Sovereign of Love and Beauty——'" No, he had read that before supper. . . . "The lists now presented a most splendid spectacle—" Yes, here was the place; yes, the tournament had been about to commence when his mother asked him to help lay the supper table.—"The lists now presented a most splendid spectacle. The sloping galleries were crowded with all that was noble, great, wealthy and beautiful. The contrast of the various dresses of these dignified spectators rendered the view as gay as it was rich, while the interior and lower space, filled with the substantial burgesses and yeomen of Merry England,



formed, in their more plain attire, a dark fringe, or border, around this circle of brilliant embroidery, relieving, and at the same time, setting off its splendour. . . .”

I declare that, if we could have leapt the high walls of silence and entered into our Stephen's fortified mind, just to see how it was decorated and what sort of company attended there, we should have found that this description of the lists at Ashby-de-la-Zouche painted a very fair picture of its gay and martial scenes. Its sloping galleries were crowded with all that was noble, great, wealthy and beautiful ; and mark you, Stephen was very sorry for the substantial burgesses and yeomen who were obliged to occupy the lower places. No wonder, then, that he concealed behind high walls such astonishing scenes. People really couldn't be told of the marvellous brave deeds he dreamed of doing before the applauding eyes of the nobility, and the fine rumour of his name that he heard echoing among the substantial burgesses in their more plain attire. Stephen Joyous-Death. Stephen Sheath-of-Death. . . .

“The heralds finished their proclamation with their usual cry of ‘Largesse, largesse, gallant knights!’ and gold and silver pieces were showered on them from the galleries, it being a high point of chivalry to exhibit liberality to those whom the age accounted at once the secretaries and the historians of honour. The bounty of the spectators was acknowledged by the customary shouts of ‘Love of Ladies—Death of Champions—Honour to the Generous—Glory to the Brave!’ To which the more humble spectators added their acclamations”—pitiable, this!—“and a numerous band of trumpeters the flourish of their martial instruments. When these sounds had ceased, the heralds withdrew in gay and glittering procession, and none remained with them save the marshals of the field, who, armed cap-à-pie, sat on horseback, motionless as statues, at the opposite ends of the lists. “To borrow lines from a contemporary poet:

## FOUR DREAMING

‘The knights are dust,  
And their good swords are rust,  
Their souls are with the saints, we trust . . . ’

Stephen rose suddenly and went to the window and looked through the lace fringe of the holland blinds.

“I thought as much,” announced he, to the people behind his head. “I thought I couldn’t hear the rain any more. It’s stopped. The clouds are breaking up, and the moon appearing every now and then. I’m going for a bit of a walk. It’s stuffy in here.”

### III

Mr. Gallimore had also picked up a book, and was reading it more smoothly than his son. It was a new book, the successor to the Roman novel; and the first two chapters showed that it was going to be a passionate love-story. Mr. Gallimore read on. He had hardly heard Stephen get up and go. Soon he had forgotten all about the boy, and the clerkship at Leicester’s, for he was engaged with certain bitter-sweet regrets. The heroine of the story, you must know, was most vividly drawn: a wild and lovely young animal, she; full of energy; full of grace; as uncertain in temper as a thoroughbred filly—to-day capricious and difficult, to-morrow humble and rapturously adoring—now teasing her young husband to jealousy and a furnace of love, now laying herself against his breast in a beautiful penitence and abandoning herself to his kiss while her eyes closed in rapture. How she was the vivid, flashing centre of her husband’s life! How she was the magnetic pole of all his thoughts; his sorest trial, no doubt, but also the spring of all that was rich and glamorous in his days!

Mr. Gallimore glanced over his book at his wife. Her hair was certainly getting grey over the ears, and her face was not a little lined; her nose—ah! the thrust of disappointment!—was tinged as if it had been out in the cold. His eyes dropped to her hands, and he saw that the fingers plying the needle were scored with



kitchen work. Looking higher, he suspected that the shoulder-blades protruded under her black blouse. Well, well. God, how he wanted a passionate love that moment ! And Ruth, his wife, was the only person with whom Society would suffer him to have it. If only, if only it were possible for him to be passionately in love with Ruth again ! *Some* women in their middle years had been vastly adorable—Cleopatra—and—and others. Why wasn't Ruth different—a little wilder—a little more capricious on the curb—a little more like a thoroughbred filly ; above all, why wasn't she rapturously adoring ? “ I am one who needs a tremendous lot of love,” he told himself. “ I have it in me to love tremendously. Emotionally starved, that's what I am ; emotionally starved. I need love back into my life. I need to be able to pour out all this affection that's bottled up in me. These sort of things go bad. And after all, forty-six is still young. It's really the prime of manhood. Many women have preferred men of that age. It's unnatural that I should always go hungry.”

But the fact remained that Society, and St. Philip and St. James's Church of which he was a sidesman, would not tolerate that he awoke to love again with anybody but Ruth. Could it be done ? She had been a pretty little thing at thirty-four when he at twenty-nine had married her ; a slim little body, with a small-featured face. Were there no traces of that prettiness now ? Yes, this side of her face that she was presenting to him, as she bent over her stockings, was neat enough, bar that slight reddening of the nose, which could be cured or concealed. But, alas ! Mr. Gallimore knew that Ruth, like many another, had a better side of her face and a worse ; and that this was much the better side at which he was surreptitiously looking. And to be perfectly frank with himself, he didn't like the other side ; he didn't like it at all. Perhaps he could have loved her—and here he enjoyed a moment of sorrowful humour—if she had been all the same as this side. But—but was it

## FOUR DREAMING

ever heard that a man was passionately in love with one side of his wife and quite indifferent to the other ?

No.

No ; it could not be done ; it was useless to think of a passionate love affair with Ruth again. He resumed his book and pretended to go on reading. But now he could not read continuously, for the distracting presence of a new idea. Wasn't some *secret* love-story possible—some *affaire* hidden from the eyes of St. Philip and St. James's ? Its very secrecy would make it more wonderful ; he and this visionary lady would discuss in delightful talks the respective claims of instinct and religion, of inclination and duty. And of course they would decide for the path of honour ; he wanted nothing else ; it was only the spiritual love that he hungered for ; he wanted to love some one with all his soul, and for that some one to love him in the same measure ; he wanted to be the only thought in some one's mind, and to have her for ever in his.

This much was surely allowable. Yes, he must smarten himself up a bit ; he must be something of the buck he remembered wanting to be, after reading that romance about Beau Nash ; to-morrow he would make himself tidy and attractive, and begin to look round.

Mr. Gallimore sank into his book again ; he could read it with a fresh interest, now that his regrets had been dissipated by a fine hope.

### IV

When Stephen stepped on to the pavement of Waldron Avenue, he turned quickly to his left and made for Bealing High Street, retracing the route his mother had taken a few hours before. He walked much faster than she, his limbs unchastened by fifty years, and his hands unladen with household food. Besides, he had cast away all worry about his clerkship, to allow a volume of delight to upswell through his body ; he was happy, irrationally happy ; he knew where he was going.



Very soon he was in Bealing High Street. It was the last week before Christmas, and the shop-fronts were as bright as if it were six o'clock instead of nine o'clock ; now that the rain had stopped there were more people on the pavements than there had been when his mother stepped off her omnibus. But neither at shops nor at people did Stephen look ; he weathered both like a darting torpedo-boat. At a point on the kerbstone he halted a moment, awaiting his opportunity to dart across the road ; a moment, no more. Under the nose of a cart-horse he ran, and under a spray of oaths from the carter ; and over the cobbles of the tramway, just before the tram's horses could pour their hot breath on his cheek, and just before their driver could emit a still hotter breath on the subject of blood and fools and sexual perversion. Stephen had now reached a refuge between the two tramway courses, an ovular island of pavement from whose centre rose the tall standard of one of the new arc lamps. The lamp spluttered its white light over the refuge and fought the yellow nimbuses of the gas lamps on the kerbs.

Had Stephen had the time or the talent for such a thought, he might have seen in that arc lamp, young, erratic, spasmodic, but insolently triumphant over the staid old gas lamps, a symbol of many transitions. This was the last year of the old century, and the vanguard of its changes, coming down the main artery from London, had only just reached Bealing High Street. Already they were building the standards for the trams that were to run without horses, being fed with electricity from overhead wires. A few miles nearer London these magnificent saloons were already sailing down the centre of the highway ; and it was this dumbfoundering spectacle that had bowed Bob's head over his fretwork tools. And look : an electric brougham with a liveried coachman on its box whispered past Stephen as he halted on his refuge. It might have told him that the hansom cabs spanking



## FOUR DREAMING

down from the city, and the four-wheelers growling after, were burning out their last few years of life. But he thought them eternal, if he thought of them at all, and hurried across the remainder of the road.

One thing that he passed could not miss the tribute of his hurried glance. It was his school. In a large, square garden (if a semicircle of grass and a semi-circumference of drive and a few dusty shrubs could be called a garden) stood the large, square house, grey and alone; and no one would have called it a school for boys, had it not cried from a large, rectangular notice-board that it really was this; nay, that it was a *college*—Bealing College—and had Mr. G. Z. Carey (of London University) for its principal, and that next term began on 15 Jan. Just as your bargeman calls himself *Captain* O'Tiller, and your little tailor commanding a battalion of the Methodist Boys' Brigade likes to be known as *Colonel* Serge, so does your suburban academy for thirty hobble-dehoys paint "College" on its notice-board; all of which is excellent, for we are miserable men if we cannot think big things of ourselves. And there was probably no greater disproportion between what Napoleon, Wagner, and Boccaccio were and what they thought themselves, and what you and I are and what we think ourselves, than between Mr. G. Z. Carey's dull little school and the fine connotations of the word "College." Be that as it may (there never was such a phrase as this one for helping you home to the point—it always reminds me of one of those R.A.C. vouchers that you give to a passing motorist when you have lost yourself in the country and your car refuses to function any further along that road, and he secures for you a break-down car that enables you, ultimately, to return to your starting-place), in the case of Bealing College on this December night, nothing but the "15 Jan.," which was a bright and recent addition slipped into a slot, told the passer-by that the faded house had not long ago been abandoned to Mr. G. Z. Carey's ghost.



## THE OLD TREE BLOSSOMED

In at that gate, and up that gravel, had Stephen tramped every schoolday from his tenth to the end of his seventeenth year. He had picked up some scraps of knowledge, mostly misleading, from old Carey and his beardless ushers ; and he had once picked up a " form prize " from the hand of a fading local celebrity, who was presenting these things in the Bealing Assembly Rooms. That must have been when he was quite young ; and the Celebrity's celebrity must even then have been flaking off like the stucco from the face of the college, because it was all gone now. The stucco has been repaired, but who shall plaster up a peeling fame ?

Be that as it may, when Stephen came out of that gate for the last time, on the last day of last term, it was with what in his head ? He knew the first few pages of the Latin Grammar, and a few conjugations of French verbs ; he could translate " Gradatim " and rehearse the capes round the coast of England ; and he had " done " Arithmetic as far as Recurring Decimals. What might be the good of any of these forms of knowledge had never troubled his thinking. He had no diploma or certificate, save only a certificate for having swum a hundred yards in the Borough Baths.

But Bealing College was a long way behind him now, and forgotten, as he walked. He swung at last round a turning, and as he did so, his heart beat fast and the exultation rose high in his throat, where it played like a physical inflation. He was getting very near his goal. This was Studio Road. The character of the houses had changed ; it was as if the rattling High Street, like a golden band, had separated the cheap and narrow people from the rich and spacious. All these houses were tall and many-windowed ; they stood alone in well-kept gardens with high walls and carriage-gates behind which they could spread themselves and throw their toys around them—their summer-houses, croquet hoops, sun-dials, rockeries, studios, and carriage-houses, belike. And as

it might be a compliment to such good company the pavement seemed wider and the road better cambered. Almost at the end of the road was a house something smaller than its neighbours, though no less redolent of good money : it was newer, and not grey like the others but red-brick and gabled, with ogives and spikes and a turret at the corner. It had been built perhaps twenty years before, when the culture that gave us Tower Bridge came washing into Bealing.

Before this mansion Stephen stopped. He looked at its closed gates. Bending his head he looked at the gravel beneath the gates. Here, on entering, a daughter of the house must necessarily step. Stephen's heart thumped as he told himself he was looking at such a spot. Then he walked to the other side of the road, and looked up at the windows. One had a light behind its blind. Half-past nine ; who would be going to bed at this hour ? Not the maids, because it was on the first floor and they ascended to skiey levels ; one of the family, then ; and none of the adults would have left their stately rooms at such an hour. It must be she ! She had looked no more than fourteen, and they would send her to bed at half-past nine. The darling ! She was undressing ; perhaps brushing her golden hair. " Edith . . . Edith . . . " All he knew of her, her name ! His heart swelled under the mighty beats of the thing beneath it ; and the inflation at his throat was a delicious pain, a dryness, a thirstiness, an ache.

## V

And while Mrs. Gallimore dreamed over her socks of the wisdom she would give to Stephen, and Mr. Gallimore dreamed of the grand passion he would seek, and Stephen stood like a troubadour beneath his lady's casement, little Bob made a fourth of the dreamers, frowning in exquisite engrossment over the details of a toy tram. Two of them were wise, I take it, and two were foolish.



### CHAPTER III

## *The Birth of a Clerk*

#### I

**I**T was the twenty-seventh or twenty-eighth of December—I am not sure which, but at any rate it was the day when clerks went back to their stools after the Christmas break ; so abominable a day. And it was cold on Bealing Station at 8.15. Mr. Gallimore and Stephen strolled up and down the platform, or stamped their feet, as they waited for the train that would carry them to Sloane Square Station. Stephen was not yet a clerk in Leicester's, nor would he be till the first of the year. He was only going to visit the doctor employed by the firm : it seemed that before he could come to birth as a clerk in Leicester's Correspondence Department, a doctor, as in other deliveries, had to bear a hand.

"It's some new dodge," said his father. "No one examined me. I expect that now they employ a hundred times as many they have to be careful. By heavens, I've seen some changes in thirty years. It was hardly more than a big shop when I first went there. Hardly more than a shop."

While his father ruminated, Stephen was picturing Leicester's, and at the picture, let me admit, his inside was shaking with trepidation. He saw the huge block of buildings with its run of plate-glass windows staring out on the jostling pedestrians, spanking carriages, and grumbling omnibuses in Gracey Street. Of its varied departments as seen by the crowd of purchasers he had long known something, because in his childhood his mother had taken him to buy blouses and lingerie at

## THE BIRTH OF A CLERK

sale prices ; but of the nature of its back parts where a hive of clerks and packers, and a doctor, upheld this dazzling front he could form but a foggy image.

The train came steaming round the bend, and they took their seats in a Third Class Smoking. The compartment had already eight people in it, seven men and a girl, and all apparently clerks travelling to their offices. For some miles the train ran on a bank level with the house-roofs and stared, right and left, with its hundred eyes at all sorts of back gardens, church towers, open greens, recreation grounds, and long, diminishing streets till suddenly, somewhere about Hammersmith, like a diving sea-serpent which has seen quite enough of the upper world, it plunged downwards and headed for a long spell underground. By this time our Gallimores' narrow, stall-like compartment, made for ten people, was holding sixteen ; six were standing between the knees, and ever and anon on the toes, of the fortunate ten on the seats. Stephen felt choked with the smoke of their pipes, and the smutty, steamy smell that blew in from the aperture above the window. Jammed in his seat by the big men on either side of him, and by the two who seemed to take it in turns, each time the train stopped, to swing on to his lap, he found himself murmuring, "Edith . . . Edith. . . ."

Why did this crampiness make him think of Edith ? There was no doubt that he found an escape into deliciousness by re-living the moment when he first saw her. Only twenty days ago ! Sunday afternoon it was, as he walked in the Raven's Park. And he hadn't been thinking of love, for though nearly seventeen he had never given this subject its proper predominance. Perhaps this was because he had never made any fast friends among his schoolfellows and so had never gone a-hunting with them, and because the few girls he knew had meant nothing to him ; they were his friends, and you couldn't fall in love with your friends. But Edith ! As he



## THE OLD TREE BLOSSOMED

walked in the park he had known that some one had turned and looked at him. Yes, she had looked at him first, not boldly but involuntarily. Turning to meet the inquiring eyes, he had seen the face of a schoolgirl whose fair hair was tied behind her neck ; a round little face, with an expression childish and simple as of one who has been guarded at home from the least touch of the world. How she reddened when she saw that her glance had been trapped ; how she turned quickly ! Nor did she look again, but walked on with the fashionable lady who was her companion. Stephen looked, however ; and looked a second and a third time ; he could not look too often at that figure just ripening from its childish slimness into enchanting curves at calf and hip and shoulder. That turn of her large eyes to his face in a sudden, unwitting interest had ignited something in him, and now it kindled to a blaze. Life lit up to a brilliance never known before. From that minute to this, when he was sitting in the crowded third-class compartment, the brilliance had remained over his life.

He had followed her at a distance ; on and on, till her mother and she left the Park by the main gates. There, to his dismay, a victoria awaited them, a shining chariot drawn by two fine bays, with a cockaded coachman on the box and a cockaded footman at its door.

Vaguely remembering his romances and detective stories, he had leapt into the first cab and instructed the driver to follow the bowling carriage ahead. So he had traced her to her home. The directory and casual inquiries at neighbouring shops had provided the rest : she was Edith Ruhlmann, the daughter of a dead banker whose widow had come to live in the Petters' old house in Studio Road. Three days later he had contrived to pass her again, while she shopped in the High Street, and she had looked at his face suddenly, undoubtedly recognizing him. Her eyes had swung away, but the look had keyed him to snapping point. Knowing now

the trade routes of this lovely vessel, he had passed her the next day, when her eyes had stared self-consciously for'ard over her bows ; and the next, when she had flown flags in her cheeks, whether wanting to salute him or not. It was wonderful.

What would happen he dared not consider. He thought he didn't want to know her just yet ; no, let him just dream about her. He was ashamed of his little servantless home in Waldron Avenue ; ashamed of the school from which he had come ; ashamed of the employment to which he was going. He must try to hold her interest till he had done something large ; or he must lose her for a while, adventure after fortune and fame, and then seek her all over the world. He saw pictures of himself and her in the grounds of a great estate ; they were cantering their horses up the woodland ride, she side-saddle on her palfrey like a tapestried figure, and he astride his incomparable mare, Hurricane Death. And perchance the footpads leapt out to assault her . . . and he rode up and sprang from his steed. . . . " Hold her, Edith ! I will not attack these vermin from the vantage point of a horse's back. . . . Now then *you* ; take *this*. And you ; take this for your pains. . . ." What execution with his little whip !

Yes, Edith Ruhlmann was his destiny, and something must be going to happen whereby he could win her ; God knew what, but something. Confidence surged in him. His resolution, that minute, seemed the same as achievement. " Edith, I love you, I love you," he said to the black wall of a tunnel and the passing steam. " Only wait for me. Only wait for me. I will do all things. . . . "

The train ran into a station. Could he, perhaps, go to South Africa where the war was still smouldering, and there win honour and a commission and . . .

" Come along, this is Sloane Square," said his father. " We get out here."



## II

The back entrance of Leicester's is in Two Shilling Street, just beyond the Packers' Dock, where the vans can be seen backed against the quays while their horses chase the bottom of their nose-bags along the floor—though stay ! I am living in the past, and they are motor vans to-day, and their waiting engines drink chunkingly at the Company's petrol in their carburettors, where formerly the horses lipped the Company's hay in their nose-bags ; but the little back door is still there, through which Mr. Gallimore led his son into the narrow, colour-washed passage. He greeted a porter somewhat ostentatiously and, after handing over all the matches in his possession, dismissed Stephen with the words, " You'll have to ask somebody where the doctor's room is. It's a new dodge since my day. . . . Do you know where the doctor hangs out, Fry ? "

" Somewhere on the third floor."

" Well, you'll find it, Stephen. So long ! "

Never before had Stephen watched with such regret his father disappearing. He stood in the passage like a sailor marooned, while his parent ship went over the horizon.

" The third floor's up them stairs, or used to be," said the porter.

A jest at that moment being as potent as dynamite to send Stephen aloft, he hastily climbed the iron-bound staircase till he reached the third floor, panting. Preferring not to speak to anyone, he walked along interminable corridors, hoping for a sign-post or the name of a doctor over a room door. There was no such thing. At several of the corners there was a notice over the fire-buckets : " In the event of a fire every employee must make up his mind to keep as cool as possible," which struck him as funny and drew a sickly laugh—sickly, because a joke is a head-aching business in the midst of a



nervous attack. Many persons passed him : hurrying clerks, ladies from the Mantles Department, one or two distinguished gentlemen in morning coats and waistcoat-slips who must be managers, sailing ladies who must be manageresses, and diminutive boys taking a message from one department to another or bearing a tray of letters to some pillar-box or post office.

It was an office boy that he stopped at last, feeling that he was less alarming than most—a grave mistake. With a show of ease he inquired :

“ I say, George : where does the doctor live ? ”

“ I dunno, and who are you georging ? ” replied the boy. “ What you want a doctor for ? Aren’t you feeling in the pink ? ”

“ Yes, of course.” Stephen blushed.

“ Well, what you want a doctor for ? Is it for some one else ? ” The boy was getting interested.

“ No, it’s for me.”

“ You said it wasn’t.”

“ I didn’t. I said——”

Just then three clerks passed, and the boy called out to them, “ I say ! Here’s a bloke wants a doctor.”

“ I don’t——” began Stephen.

All three had stopped with instant interest and some delight.

“ What did you say ? ”

“ This cove wants a doctor.”

“ No, I don’t. I——”

“ Well, he asked *me* for a doctor.”

“ I was told I must see one. . . .” Stephen could say no more. Like a new boy who would come to this great school next term, he was too ashamed of his unborn condition to publish it before this horrid and capable child.

“ There’s a doctor in Regency Square,” suggested one of the clerks.

“ But I mean the doctor attached to this establishment.”

"Establishment—*gor*!" laughed the boy, who had never heard Leicester's called an establishment before.

Stephen went redder than ever, and the clerk lifted the toe of his boot at the boy who shot his rump under his waist to avoid contact and ran off, calling from a distance where impudence was safe, "Mind he don't die on your hands."

"Are you really feeling ill?" asked one of the young gentlemen sympathetically.

"No. Only I've been given this paper and I've got to get the doctor to sign it. You see, if he passes me, I'm going to be a new clerk next week."

"Crikey!" said the young gentleman, staring at Stephen as if he had never before seen a clerk in this antenatal state. "Yes. Well. There is a doctor, of course. He comes to see us if we don't turn up to work, under the Provident Fund scheme. A jovial cuss. But where he hangs out here, I don't know."

"I do," declared another of them. "Come, I'll show you."

He led Stephen along several more passages to a closed door, which bore the name "Dr. Waterhead," and left him standing there. Stephen knocked, but received no answer, though he heard voices within. A second knock was just as lost on the morning air. Fearfully, he turned the handle and looked in. He saw a room quite bare except for the linoleum on the floor and a form against each of its walls. On these forms a little male congregation was assembled; some wore the black coats and linen collars of clerks or salesmen or travellers, some the coarser clothes of packers, and one, now the most terrifying of all, wore the buttons of an office boy and read the journal *Chips*.

This, then, was the antechamber; and that door in the further wall would lead to the doctor's consulting room. The unborn coughed apologetically, and sat down. Supposing that the order of precedence in this waiting



room would be that of "First come, first served," as in a hairdresser's levee, and not that of rank as in a King's, he waited till every one had preceded him, and then knocked at the doctor's door and passed in. The doctor, stout and breezy, said, "Damn! How many more of you are there?" and taking Stephen's paper, examined it, tossed it aside, and said, "Righto, lad. Strip. Let's see you as your first doctor saw you."

Much discountenanced, Stephen removed coat and waistcoat and sat down to unlace his boots with a view to drawing off his trousers and pants.

"No—bless us!—you needn't take off your boots and pants," said the doctor. "Drop 'em, lad, drop 'em."

For some minutes Stephen could not see what "drop 'em" might mean and was far too nervous to ask, so he gained time by lifting off his shirt and under-vest, in the hope that illumination would quickly come. Then when he stood with naked breast, holding up his trousers against a disaster, it occurred to him that if instead of holding them up he dropped them—trousers, pants and all—he would probably be thought to have stripped. So with great misgiving lest he were wrong, he adventured all, and let fall his last decency. Down the mast tumbled all his canvas and rigging and lay huddled about his boots. It would shackle him, he saw, should he be invited to advance, from anything but a shuffling, sack-race rhythm. He felt acutely his humiliation and his fetters; and, indeed, is there any more humiliating position for a man? A man in the perfection of nudity is, no doubt, a majestic thing; and a man standing naked with his feet in the long grasses or the wide sea is a picture not unlovely; but a man standing in a collapsed, accordion-pleated pile of trousers and pants, with a festoon of dead braces, and his toes peeping from under the wreck, is probably the most humiliating sight on earth. Even in the privacy of his bedroom he steps quickly out of such a position.



"Come a little forward," invited the doctor. "I've got to look at ye fore and aft."

Stephen advanced. What a difference between the gallant landowner cantering on his incomparable mare up the woodland ride, and this naked boy, trotting on his concertina'd trousers up the linoleum! At a point where he judged he could be seen fore and aft he halted the ludicrous motion; and stood still, feeling like a slave exposed in the market-place, while the doctor, quite unperturbed, examined without blushes or apology everything of Stephen that had now been made available.

When he had finished, he put hands in his pockets and looked up with a smile at Stephen's face.

"God!" he said. "A boy like you ought to go in for farming or soldiering or professional cricket. What are ye coming here for to this stuffy life? It'll only spoil a good thing."

Stephen grinned.

"Well, it's not my business, I suppose, lad. But save us! sitting on your behind nine hours a day and contracting your tummy over a desk! . . . Can't be helped, I suppose. . . . But God's pity, lad! play cricket at nights in the summer and walk all the way home in winter. Don't let them spoil a good thing. Look here, don't you tell 'em I said all this. 'Tain't my business, exactly, to turn away the best. . . . But there you are! you ought to go where there are horses, my lad. Go where there are horses. You were built for finer things than this."

Stephen smiled and said nothing; he was most abominably near to tears.

"Well," said the doctor, "it's a funny world," and turned to his desk and wrote the necessary comments on Stephen's papers.

## CHAPTER IV

### *Nothing Happens*

#### I

**I**T was the first of the year, and cold at 8.15. Again stood Mr. Gallimore and his son on the platform at Bealing, waiting for the train to town.

"I'm beginning my thirtieth year there, and you your first," said Mr. Gallimore, which did nothing to raise Stephen's spirits.

Mr. Gallimore had no idea that there was a nervous trembling in and about his son's stomach; nor had Stephen any idea that his father was warmed by an agreeable sense of importance. But this was certainly Mr. Gallimore's condition. Having forgotten his disappointment that he could do no better for his boy than take him to this clerkship, he was feeling, for the moment, pleased and proud: to-day he was the man of long experience about to initiate a neophyte into difficult mysteries that to himself were familiar and easy; and to do this is always to stand, for a space, on one of the few spots of high ground one has conquered in life. Like an actor-manager pondering how he would produce the play so that it might set off his personality to the best advantage, he was contemplating his movements and appearances during the day. He would walk ahead of Stephen, showing him the route to the Correspondence Department; there he would introduce him to his fellow-clerks; then, having found him a stool, he would move away to his own glass-screened office, which was that of the Assistant Manager; or, if things turned out as he had secretly planned, and Doyle, the Manager, were



away, he would move up into that gentleman's mahogany saloon, and sit there at his large mahogany desk, like a captain on the bridge ; he would touch the bell whenever he needed the office boy, and the office boy would run to him ; at noon he would tinkle the bell twice as a lordly warrant for the twelve o'clock lunchers to leave ; at 1, or at 1.10 perchance, since a manager was not tied like the others to the striking of a clock, he would descend from his dais, draw on his gloves, and invite Stephen to come out with him to lunch ; this first day he would spend more than his usual eighteenpence—say two shillings, because it was the boy's introduction to life ; then he would take him back to the office—"I'm not bound to be back myself, Stephen, but you'd best not overstay the hour, or it'd look like favouritism" ; during the afternoon he might perhaps rebuke one or two of the clerks whose letters were below his exacting standard ; once or twice he would walk up and down between the long desks, supervising work with his hands under his coat-tails ; and at six o'clock, when all the clerks would be standing up, waiting in their overcoats till it were his pleasure to dismiss them, he would delay a minute ere pronouncing, "You may go now. Good night, all !" Oh, he hoped Doyle would be away. Sharp disappointment were he not ! For he had dressed particularly well this morning to be worthy of this dignified rôle.

And with pride in his own starred rôle went something more than pride in the good looks of the young super he was introducing into the chorus of clerks. It was with little less than suppressed glee that he pictured himself presenting Stephen to his colleagues, "This is my boy, Thompson. This is he, Denby. This is Stephen, Candler. I hope you'll help him as much as possible." No other clerk, he wagered, could produce a son like Stephen. "By Jove," they would say among themselves, "Gallimore's son is a fine boy, isn't he ?" Really, when you came to think of it, Stephen's tall,



fair beauty was the one thing in his life that had come out perfectly right. So aristocratic he looked ; every one said it ; " aristocratic " was the word they always used. Stephen was a better proof than all his grandfather's researches that the Gallimores were a noble strain. It must be from his father's blood that he had drawn that distinguished appearance ; no one would suppose that it could come from that rather disappointingly undistinguished little woman, his mother. " Not that I think my own looks the equal of Stephen's," reflected Mr. Gallimore. " I'm glad I'm tall, and I fancy most people would take me for a gentleman, in any old clothes. But I readily admit that Stephen leaves me nowhere. Yes, I've no delusions on that score. I readily admit—— "

The train came in.

Let us not deplore Mr. Gallimore's thoughts on Bealing Station. Is it not good to see him, just this once, standing on his only high ground ? And for those of you who want the good man to be happy, let me tell you at once that Mr. Doyle *was* absent, and that Mr. Gallimore's performance was a great success ; so much so that Stephen watched with a new, surprised respect this imposing parent.

## II

In a few weeks—a few days almost—Stephen, behind whose silences hid the generous swagger of a tourney-knight, was driven by his nature to ape the pale swagger of a London clerk. In the train he read a halfpenny paper, feeling not a little pride in buying his own paper and reading it like his father and other business men ; arrived at the office, he changed into an old office coat, made cuffs of white paper and pushed them over his starched linen cuffs, stuffed a handkerchief up his sleeve and sat on his stool with the sense of acting the part well ; writing his letters, he even changed his forward-flowing hand for an upright, ornamental one that he

admired in George Parkhurst, his neighbour ; and in a little while he had a *papier maché* snuff-box in the corner of his desk, like so many of the other fellows, and periodically sniffed a pinch at either nostril, wondering as he did so what satisfaction they got out of it. Just before the six o'clock dismissal, after the fashion of both his neighbours, he filled under the shelter of his desk the pipe that he would light up in the blessed freedom of the pavements. Is it mercy in nature or ruthlessness which compels us so quickly to imitate the new order into which we are thrown and settle down in it with diminishing rebellion ?

On Fridays at about five o'clock he succeeded the clerk who was alphabetically before him in a visit to the Manager's mahogany loose-box, where he was given from a pile of coins a half-sovereign and a florin, the remaining sixpence of his salary being retained for Leicester's Provident Fund. Except for this jolly moment, perhaps the most beautiful minutes of the week were those that came each day between 12.45 and 1, and between 5.45 and 6. Truly a philosopher who would measure and compare the happinesses of men might justify all the mechanical drudgery of a stooled clerk by proving that none but he can experience the excellent quarter-to-one and quarter-to-six sensations. To watch the large hand of the clock-face click second by second towards the hour of release and relaxation, I vow there is nothing quite like it ; and schoolboys, clerks, and all such boxed-up scriveners can enjoy it twice a day.

At six he and his father became two molecules in the great stream of dark-clad people that was flowing to the District Railway Station ; now the stream had washed him into a train, where he read a novel, clinging, as likely as not, to the luggage rack for support ; by Hammersmith he had won to a seat ; up went the train from its worm-holes underground, and here was Bealing. Bealing ; five minutes now, and he would be luxuriously at home.



At home he always found that his mother, by perfect timing, had a sizzling hot supper on the table ; to which he and his father (who had long ago lapsed from his Roman creed with its wearisome bathings) straightway sat down. Life was by no means unpleasant.

That was the trouble : life was by no means unpleasant. And Easter came to London, bringing the spring ; and the spring heightened into a summer that blazed through the sixth-floor windows of the Correspondence Department, setting the clerks to work in their shirt-sleeves ; and nothing happened ; and Stephen made no move towards escape.

### III

Perhaps his dream of a larger life would have gradually faded out, had not the flaxen pigtail of Edith Ruhlmann twinkled ahead of him like a coastal light from the dream-land. He saw it now only once a week, between 11 and 12.30, in the pews of her church, St. Francis, Curdway. From it he drew new aspiration and faith and hope ; which is exactly what a church is for. It was too well-behaved to turn round and give its back to the altar, so Stephen for an hour and a half had never a glimpse of its mistress's face ; but he was content, and during the psalms and hymns directed the shaft of his song at the peeping lobe of her ear.

He did not want to meet her yet. Not yet. Let her keep him in her imagination as something better than he was. He liked to think that he walked in those day-dreams as a public-schoolboy, or perhaps as a boy of leisure and wealth who was reading with a tutor for Oxford, or perhaps a titled youth, an Honourable This or Sir Peter That. What would she think if she knew he earned twelve and sixpence a week at Leicester's. When he had lifted himself to a position worthy of her, then . . .

*When.* Aye, when ? Edith with her golden hair tied

by a black bow and lying like a pendent plume on a red dress to-day, a blue dress next week, a wine-coloured coat the Sunday after, or, as the spring came, a light fawn jacket where it shone with the mild harmony of gold chasing on a full-calf volume—Edith buttoning her white kid gloves after the blessing, and giving, maybe, a quick, guilty glance in his direction from under the broad brim of her hat—Edith might be the symbol of that more gilded living which he dreamed of, but would he ever reach it? What would happen? What *could* happen? The days went by, and he did nothing; he did not see what he could do. He only dreamed; if at times he didn't forget to dream. Probably many others had begun with this dreamy rebellion in their hearts, and, thirty years later, had found themselves, like his father, still growing in the spot where they had first been thrown, their roots now tight and old.

Thinking these thoughts one evening, while he sat in the train, he looked at his father in the corner seat opposite him. The old boy was getting rather fat, wasn't he, and the crumple in his waistcoat was mounting higher. His bowler hat was pushed back, not a long way, for that was vulgar, but just off the bosses of his temples. He was reading a novel, and now, as his son watched him, laid it down on the seat and stared out of the window at the railway lines and the house-backs. He seemed a little comatose. Well, perhaps it was better to be like that, and more restful; to be content with a day of familiar office-work, a sizzling hot supper at night, a few hours in an easy chair, and then a warm bed; it was to have reached one's freedom from restless discontents and impossible hopes; it was to have left them so far behind that they were forgotten.

## IV

Mr. Gallimore had laid down his novel that he might follow the thoughts it created. It was a tale of the middle



years in married life, and its central figure was a wife who at fifty was even more attractive to her husband than she had been at twenty-five. Though the couple were not really wealthy, their home was a miracle ; this comely woman, who had all the gracious qualities of a *grande dame*, had transfigured the air of that eighty-pound-a-year house into the air of a chateau. When the husband returned at night, he would be so moved with gratitude for her presence that he would take her face between his hands and kiss her.

Here Mr. Gallimore had laid down his novel to picture his wife. Why wasn't she, even in their narrow circumstances, more of a—a *grande dame* ? There was nothing *grande* about his home or about Ruth. In imagination, as he gazed out of the window at the canvas back of Earl's Court Exhibition, he walked up the stairs of No. 33 Waldron Avenue to examine its rooms and feed his disappointment ; and he saw a narrowness in the stair-carpet, a darkness on the glazed wall-paper of the passages, a cheapness in the bedroom furniture, and scars on all things. And, gazing out of the window, he longed for a different home—not a wealthy one, for his tastes were modest to-night, but one, say, of £80 a year—where the staircase was wider and the rooms took larger furniture and everything, though not dear, was perfect of its kind, no carpet threadbare, no sideboard scratched, no brass abraded. He saw its mistress a woman of full bosom, who wore, not a skirt and blouse like Ruth, but a *robe*, and carried it with the movements and manners of a *grande dame*. And he saw himself, in a neat suit, well-pressed, coming down the stairs to where she awaited him by a beautifully appointed table in the dining-room, a stylish maid behind her at the sideboard.

When, half an hour later, he stood on the steps of No. 33, feeling for his latchkey, Mrs. Gallimore opened the door briskly and said, "Come along, my dears, it's all ready." From behind her there came a scent, extra-

ordinarily appetising, how crude soever, of onions frying on the gas stove. Mr. Gallimore looked at her with the interest that had been accumulating since Earl's Court Station. The steam of the kitchen had made her skin shiny and red and disarrayed her hair. Her apron still covered her skirt and blouse. Ah well, ah well . . . it was an attractive habit of hers always to have the meat sizzling hot the very moment they reached the hall door. Could one not forget the imperfections of external things and love only the inner soul? You could search the world before you found a better soul than Ruth. Could he not—the metaphor was inelegant, but it exactly expressed his thought—"stoke up" for Ruth the passionate adoration he so desired? For a moment he believed he could, or, rather, he refused to hear the "No" in his heart, and the prospect gladdened him.

"I shall not be a minute, Ruth dear," said he. "But I think I'll have a little wash first. I feel grubby to-night."

He hung up his coat on the hall-stand, and when he saw it hanging ungracefully, stepped back to it and ordered its folds.

"And you ought to wash too, Stephen," added he, hastening up the stairs that he might not see this suggestion ignored. While he washed his hands, he gave further thought to the prospect of loving Ruth, and it was wonderful how it warmed him. He brushed his hair and his jacket, straightened his tie, and stepped down the stairs with a certain quiet and dignity. In the dining-room, where Mrs. Gallimore stood waiting him, he went up to her and took her face between both his hands and kissed it.

"A nice supper you've made, Ruth dear."

And as he sat down he smoothed a wrinkle out of the cloth and covered a gravy stain with the cheese dish.

"Well, I've got your and Stephen's favourite dish—a nice little bit of steak," replied Mrs. Gallimore, sitting



## NOTHING HAPPENS

down too. She sat opposite a plate of porridge, which had a jug of milk and castor of sugar beside it. She didn't care for meat at night, she always maintained.

Mr. Gallimore lifted off the cover.

"Swish! Onions!" exclaimed Stephen, making his father wince.

## CHAPTER V

### *This Side of Exeter*

#### I

THEIR fortnight of holiday came to the Gallimore men in September, Mr. Gallimore having waited, as Assistant Manager, while his superior, away in Eastbourne, sat in privileged occupation of the choice month of August.

"I shall have to spend it at home," he mourned. "I can't possibly afford to take three people away."

It was evening; and Mrs. Gallimore, as usual, was sitting with her work-basket, opposite her husband in the easy chair. She appeared to think awhile, and then, without taking her eyes off her sewing, asked:

"Why couldn't you and Stephen go on a holiday together?"

"No, I shouldn't like to do that," said Mr. Gallimore, who was much enamoured of the idea. "No, I shouldn't like to do that. . . . It wouldn't be fair, I mean, not to take you too. . . . No."

"I think it would be quite fair. You and Stephen have had long, hard months of work. And I want Stephen to have a real holiday."

"Besides, I can't afford even to go alone with Stephen. It would cost twenty pounds or more."

"It'd be false economy to refuse to spend that. . . . You need a holiday, I'm sure. And so does Stephen. You are the engines that make the living. It would never do if they broke down."

As she said it, she stretched out her material in front of her and looked along it, beginning at one end and travelling to the other.



"Yes, I feel I need a change very badly," agreed Mr. Gallimore. . . . "I'm below par, certainly. I ought to get right away from it all for a fortnight. . . . But you need a change too, don't you?"

"I'm not feeling the need of it much," persisted his wife. "Besides, I want to take care of little Bob so that George and May can get away."

"Yes, there is that," nodded Mr. Gallimore, with something of the satisfaction of a shipwrecked mariner at the first sight of a sail.

"And with you and Stephen away, and little Bob at school, I can have a very restful time. I shall enjoy it. I shall have long reads."

Mr. Gallimore, on reflection, shook his head.

"I don't like it. . . . I confess I don't. . . . You ought to have a holiday too, working this house as you have to. . . . Yes, it ought to be all of us or none. . . . Unless"—this time he glimpsed, not a sail alone, but a large vessel—"perhaps next year you and Stephen could go alone, and I'd stay back here with Bob."

"Perhaps," echoed Mrs. Gallimore, beginning to sew again. Was there a faint smile at her lips? he wondered. You never quite knew where you were with Ruth.

"There's no 'perhaps' about it," he assured her irritably. "I could very well do that. I should like to."

"Well, whatever happens next year, you and Stephen are to go and enjoy yourselves now. I'll be getting your things in order to-morrow."

Then the vessel was really alongside! Mr. Gallimore, excited as a child, hastily summoned Stephen that he might board it with him. Explanatory paragraphs tumbled helter-skelter from his lips as he showed the boy its splendours. Land's End, eh? Land's End, with the Atlantic breezes all round one. A wonderful journey in the train, going farther and farther west. Then a coach-ride to the last extremity of England. Not of England, of Europe. Nothing to do for fourteen days

except bathe and boat and fish, or lie on the high headland above the sea, dawdling over a book, or watching the butterflies in the grass, or listening to the gulls screaming out of the rocks, or waiting for the great ships to loom out of the mists in the Far Atlantic. . . .

His eyes were alight as he spoke, and Mrs. Gallimore plied her needle happily.

## II

And the middle week of September saw Stephen and his father in two corner seats of a Great Western Railway train that was racing to Penzance. Do I seem always to be giving you the railway thoughts of Robert and Stephen Gallimore? It is because the rhythmic motion of a train sooner or later lures all men down into their secret lives, and it is of these subterranean places, not of superficial things, that we are instructed to write to-day. Therefore, in a journey as long as this, I sit close to the Gallimores and wait and listen till I know I am overhearing their innermost thoughts; when I whip out my note-book and pencil and write like the wind. Then I know that I am interviewing, for the titillation of the public, the fundamental Mr. Gallimore, the quintessential Stephen.

Somewhere in Somerset, Stephen, having wearied of his illustrated papers and his novel, turned to stare out of the window; and, moved by the beauty of the landscape, filled high with thoughts of Edith. Now Edith, occupying his mind of late like an heiress her gardens, had worked something of a miracle there. How shall I phrase it? She had sown among his thoughts the seeds of a keener awareness; she had raised in that uncultivated soil the principles of vision, so that Stephen could now, under a puckered forehead, criticize civilization and his place in it. He could see that he was but a cog in the vast machine of Leicester's. The metaphor of the cog had come unaided into his mind, and he would probably



have been most annoyed if he had learnt that other men had thought of it before him. A cog, that's what he was ; one of the forty cogs in the wheel of Leicester's Correspondence Department. And the Correspondence Department itself was only a small wheel set in motion by far larger and far more important wheels of which it saw and understood nothing. " And I'll go round and round in that wheel for thirty years, I dare say—like father," thought he, staring out at the high-heaving hills and brick-red soil of Devonshire. " I shall know nothing of the main business that drives me round ; I shall just be one of its outer effects. Fancy never having been, in all one's life, the *cause* of anything, but always an *effect* ! By heavens ! I pray I'm the cause of something before I die."

" Go where there are horses." Strange how that remark of the breezy doctor's had rooted in his mind ! It seemed to call to something in his blood. What did it suggest, when you came to probe it ? Farmlands. Yes, and battlefields. Not much else.

Farmlands. Could he escape to a farm of his own ; to such a farm as that one yonder, which lay like a patchwork quilt on the up-and-down hills ? If so, this grey stone farmhouse would be his home. Curing hams hung from the kitchen beams, eh ? But psha ! was there ever anyone less qualified for a farmer than he ? After living all his seventeen years in Waldron Avenue, what did he know of the earth and its ways. He knew that winter was cold and summer warm, and that leaves came out in the spring and fell, all brown and red, in the autumn. Of all these glorious trees, which could he recognize ? The oak, because of its acorn . . . and the holly, because of Christmas . . . and the mistletoe . . . but was there a mistletoe tree ? Birds—look at those birds. And of all the birds he would pass on this journey he could name but one—the redbreast, because of the Christmas cards. Oh yes, and the pigeon. Or

was a pigeon a dove? And of all these fields that composed the patchwork of the farms, which were oats and which wheat and which barley. He was sure he couldn't say. And frankly he wouldn't swear that he didn't believe these three things the same. If anyone asked him, did they ripen in spring or autumn, he could only grimace. Meadows now, spotted with flowers. And there was no wild flower that he could greet by name, except the daisy and the buttercup.

Battlefields. Ah, there was the true call in the doctor's words! "Go where there are horses"—by jove, you could hear in them the rumble of artillery over distant deserts, and the galloping of cavalry; and no wonder something in his blood had leapt to them in instant response; did he not come from crusading sires?

Now this swaggering belief in the crusading sires is not, I fancy, to be discounted as pure myth. Mr. Gallimore's father, the Rev. Walter Gallimore, had discovered it, and there was never a genealogist in England whose accuracy I would trust sooner than the Rev. Walter Gallimore's. The Rev. Walter Gallimore was a handsome old dandy who, quite late in his career, had become so profoundly conscious of a nobility in his veins which sorted but poorly with his position as an unbeneficed curate, and had so vividly remarked in himself a certain dignity of form and carriage which transcended anything he could remark in his colleagues, that he felt compelled to seek out what might be the source of these things. That he and his old parents were the only Gallimores to be traced in England was surely as significant a fact as, in his hidden heart, it had always been a delightful one. So the tired curate began to spend far more time over genealogical tables and ancient records than he did over his books of scriptural exegesis, and far more money on journeyings to distant churches where he might hunt among the registers in their muniment rooms than he could afford. He became a genealogist with a nostril



that loved the dust and mould of parish archives, and with a soul that lived among the long-dead people whose only footprints were these yellowing names on yellowed pages. I think his imagination strolled along mediæval streets far more often than his body trod the most unattractive streets of his London "district." His fine, seeking spirit, leaving the souls of his parishioners in the hands of God, pierced its way right back to Provence and the days of the troubadours, keeping all the while on the true line of his family ; and here in Provence, under the shadow of a rock-high castle, he found such an ancestor as could well be accepted for the founder of his family, the sufficient cause of all that he felt in himself of nobility and poetry.

Robert of Miraval. According to a fragment of Geoffrei, the prior of Vigemois, there was in the following of the great Raymond IV of St. Gilles, Count of Toulouse and Venaissin, Lord of Auvergne and Languedoc, a Robert of Miraval, one of the earliest mentioned troubadours. He was a knight—which was an immense relief to the Rev. Walter Gallimore who, knowing only too well the lowly state of many of the troubadours, had dreaded lest his long journey had led him, after all, to some rascally fellow who would compromise him. Robert of Miraval was a poor man, granted—but a knight withal ; probably a quick-brained, original fellow who, after casting an interested eye on the gifts and wealth accumulated by the troubadours, had not hesitated to step into the profession himself. With Count Raymond he went crusading to the East, having, it is related, raised no small part of his lord's great host by the exercise of his minstrelsy. In the courts of Raymond V and Raymond VI, princely patrons of troubadours, Walter Gallimore had soon found the son and grandson of this most famous man, and they were called Stephen of Miraval and Robert of Miraval. (By the way, Mr. Walter Gallimore had married late, and it was

just when he arrived at these exciting encounters that our Mr. Gallimore appeared in the world, a robust baby, who his father did not doubt would do much to restore the glories of his ancient name : so he called him Robert, and vowed that his descendants should be Roberts and Stephens till the end of time.)

But it was not through the son, Stephen of Miraval, troubadour to Raymond V, that the line had come which later branched into the Gallimores. This had issued from another son, a Robert like his father, who had come to England in the time of the Lion-Heart—hence, of course, Stephen's careful reading of "Ivanhoe," where he hoped to find mention of his ancestor in the train of the Black Knight. The name Gallimore did not appear till Reformation times ; and Walter had many interesting theses to explain it. He held that a courtliness and elegance must have been such conspicuous parts in the men of his stock that they had early been accorded a surname built from *Galli mores*, or "manners of a Gaul." True, when he had submitted this to a friend in whose Latinity he had more faith than in his own, the friend had suggested that the words might equally well mean, "manners of a cock," and had even gone further and hinted that the derivation might be *gallus morus*, which would imply, said he, "a foolish cock." Needless to say Walter, when his son grew older, never mentioned these unfortunate possibilities, and our Mr. Gallimore, whose Latin was negligible, was happily preserved from their discovery. Our Stephen was not the least likely to dig them up from their well-merited burial, because he was on quite a different trail.

I tell you, Walter Gallimore would have loved his grandson, had he lived to know him ; for Stephen, when told of these troubadour ancestors, had been thrilled beyond measure and, from that time onward, found the game of seeking explanations for the family surname one of the most enthralling pastimes in the world. Having no Latin



worth speaking of, but quite a bagful of French, he amused himself by excavating in the latter language for the origins of the name Gallimore. It was reasonable, was it not, since the story began in Provence. With the aid of a French dictionary, he happened on what he considered two brilliant surmises ; and for my part, I allow them a brilliance, and like to see in their creation a last glimmering of the poetic genius of the Gallimores. I am sure that Stephen, by the time of our first introduction to him, had persuaded himself that one or other of these must be the correct solution. They were too beautiful not to be. Robert Gaillard-Mort, or Robert Gaine-de-Mort. You had heard of William Fier-à-Bras, which must mean William Proud-of-Arm, and of Richard the Lion-Heart, so why not Robert Gaillard-Mort, which was to say, Robert Joyous-Death. Or if not Gaillard-Mort, then Gaine-de-Mort, Robert Sheath-of-Death. One or other of these might well have been the title of the famous battling troubadour, Robert of Miraval. Such pictures they carried ! Robert Joyous-Death : did it not show you the minstrel-knight charging among the Saracens and delivering death with every sweep of his joyous blade ? Or Robert Sheath-of-Death : grand, grim picture, this : the terrible knight riding at the head of his men with certain death-to-all-foes sleeping in the scabbard at his side.

## III

“ This must be Exeter,” said Mr. Gallimore, as the train rolled into a city of spires and towers. “ Wonderful to be going steadily west, isn’t it ? Every second you’re reaching your farthest west, Stephen.”

Now, strictly speaking, it is no more wonderful to be going steadily west than steadily east or north or south. But the words found a ready soil in Stephen. What precisely they might mean he troubled no more than his father did ; and herein he was perfectly right, for

## THE OLD TREE BLOSSOMED

words at their highest, as when you say, "Go where there are horses," or "It's wonderful to be going steadily west. Every second you are reaching your farthest west, Stephen," are attaining the condition of music, whose meaning one should not know but only feel. And Stephen, like his musing father, felt that "going steadily west" was going ever into newness, into the other places, towards and towards the impossible happiness—moving always, and thus escaping discontent, because hoping always.





## CHAPTER VI

### *The Mischief by the Sea*

#### I

**I**N Sennen Village, the last village in England, on the hill above Sennen Cove, they had two clean little rooms over a shop. But it was not the Robert and Stephen Gallimore of District Railway trains that Sennen saw, but a tall man, pleasantly plump, in a grey flannel suit and a black silk cummerbund, and a slim boy, in a white sweater and football shorts, his fair hair damped into curls by the wet wind of the headland. In a few days both were as brown as Colonials on furlough. There was nothing in their appearance to suggest that they were not a wealthy merchant, still young and active, and his boy on holiday before his return to Eton. Nor was there much in Mr. Gallimore's mind to suggest he was anything else ; he was feeling just like that. Such is the effect of a new suit, even if it is only a holiday suit of grey flannel, that he not only felt but actually was—while the newness lasted, and the accompanying leisure—on an equality of ease with the wealthiest in the land. He could have fished or bathed with royalty, nor felt any fundamental inferiority.

After the morning bathe, the father spent most of his hours sitting on the sands of Sennen Cove, alternately reading a book (while he adventured a green stalk among his teeth) and holding up his field-glasses to examine the fishing fleet or a coastwise trawler heading for Bristol, or yonder great liner looming out of the Atlantic. And his heart ached pleasantly, so responsive was he to the poetry with which these vessels were laden ; especially

that great and wealthy ship, as it came up the horizon's curve, from out of its westerly mists.

Those westerly mists ! The lands and people behind the mists and down the slope beyond the horizon ! The sky-scraping cities, the great lakes, the mantle of snows to the north, the wide prairie with the galloping horsemen, the pine forests, the mountains and the canyons ! To Mr. Gallimore, dropping his glasses to meditate, this incoming ship bore a freight of such visions. It signalled to him that he should peer for thoughts beyond the ranges of his intellect. Was there not an outward thrust in the English, a restlessness, a hunger always to escape from what they knew to what they did not know ? The Saxon faring from his wooded seaboard in Sleswick under Denmark ; the Viking, standing above his creeks and planning a summer raid to the Islands behind the mists ; the unquiet Normans who were but the Vikings' children—these had mixed their blood to make the present Englishmen. Then had come the gay Crusaders, the minstrels (like the Founder of his Family), the Flemings and the Huguenots. England had been a reservoir for all the nobly discontented and the restlessly dreaming. His own little discontents, were they perhaps all that was left, in a machine-bound world, of this English restlessness and this English dreaming ? I think Mr. Gallimore was trembling on a truth. Perhaps, when he said " It is wonderful to be going steadily westward," and had little notion what he meant, all the rovers, rebels, and recalcitrants who have built the London wage-earner of to-day spoke in dimmed, forgotten accents. It was no meaningless whim, I conjecture, that sent Mr. Gallimore when he had a fortnight's holiday to the terminus of the Great Western Road ; no accident, but some old and dying rebellion in his blood, that drove him to the farthestmost creeks of his English land.



## II

Stephen would wander along the sands alternately hooking up sand-eels and dreaming of Edith. Sometimes he travelled two or three miles on the firm wet sands or the hard slippery rocks. And it was one morning, when he was moving on the empty sands, about a mile and a half from the grey spot with a white head which was his father, and hooking up his sand-eels and putting them into the fish-basket slung on his hip, that he became conscious of two pairs of eyes watching him. The gaze came from two hammock chairs and from under two sunshades that made a patch of brightness on the stretch of sand between the rocks and the hill-slope. Just by the chairs a path led up to a lonely bungalow which was, one surmised, the holiday home of the two ladies under the sunshades. He could not distinguish how young or how old they might be, but they looked very fresh and pleasant in their summer clothes. The next day he saw them again, and the day after; and soon he knew that a reciprocal interest was flashing between him and them.

But he was too shy to take a first step towards acquaintance, and it was the taller of the two women who, in the end, called to him frankly. He walked up, stumbling a little in his embarrassment and reddening.

"I hope you won't mind," said she; "we're quite unconventional people, and my friend here wanted to know you."

"I didn't," protested the other, without looking up. "It was you more than me."

"Well, it was both of us. Let's be honest, it was both of us."

He blushed deeper and smiled.

"That's funny, because I've long been wanting to know you."

"Yes, we guessed that—we guessed that," said his

new friend cheerily ; and her words pitched high and quick in her cheeriness. " But how nice of you ! We like people to want to know us, don't we, Laurie ? "

" I hope I haven't been staring," submitted Stephen.

" No, you've been Modesty itself."

" And we've been Impropropriety itself, I'm sure," said the second woman, lifting up her face. " But my hostess is an artist, and that explains all."

Her entry into the talk turned Stephen's eyes towards her. She was younger and much prettier than the tall woman, who, to speak truth, was more equine in feature than her muslin dress and gay sunshade had led one to suppose ; to which fact was doubtless due her hearty manner. But this younger woman, even a boy could observe, was not far from beauty ; and if she was a little adrift of it now, she must have been in complete possession of it, not many years ago. She was probably thirty or thirty-two. Her hair was auburn and plentiful, and her deep full eyes looked straight into yours till they had compelled you to turn away.

" Are you on holiday alone ? " she asked.

Stephen turned away. This showed him the grey spot in the distance, and he expounded it to the ladies as his father.

" We must know him—we must certainly know him," shouted the leading lady. " And now would you like to come up and see my home ? "

" Is that where you live, then ? " asked Stephen, throwing up his eyes towards the little spreading, white-painted bungalow, with its garden of shrubs and hardy flowers, cut out of the blown hill-side.

" That's my summer residence where I come to paint."

" And where she lets me stay with her when I am in England," supplied the beautiful friend.

" Why ? Don't you live in England ? " Stephen asked her, as they walked up the path.

She made with her mouth a grimace that became it



exceedingly, and whispered as if it were a shocking secret, "*Persia!*"

"Good Lord, how ripping!" exclaimed Stephen.

"It's Hell," said the beauty.

The hostess talked them volubly up the hill and into the bungalow, and Stephen saw that its main room, very long, was at once a dining-room, drawing-room, and studio. Unframed canvases of the Cornish coast, or of the heads of Cornish fishermen, hung on the walls, stood on the floor, or reclined against the legs of easels and chairs. A vast square of coco-nut matting covered the boards, with a number of Persian rugs and prayer-mats sprawling over it and over one another. The easy chairs were mostly wicker, and they matched but poorly with the large mahogany dining-table.

"I should like to live here always," proclaimed he.

"Isn't he gallant—*isn't* he gallant?" cried the hostess.

"Well, what about coming to tea this very afternoon?"

"I should love to," answered Stephen, and a mischievous look sparkled in his eyes. "But may I bring Joyous-Death as well?"

"Bring *what*?" screamed the hostess.

"Joyous-Death."

"Is it a dog?" inquired the younger woman.

"No, it's my father. I call him that after an ancestor of ours who was very famous in crusading times."

"Oh, do tell us all about him," shouted the hostess.

"I love ancestors."

They sat themselves down for the recital, and Stephen told them much of the story of Robert of Miraval. An incurable sense of honour, however, forced him to conclude: "Of course, we aren't certain that our name is a corruption of *Gaillard Mort*, but it seems the likeliest explanation."

"Oh, be certain of it, be certain of it," shrieked the hostess. "It's much too beautiful an idea not to be certain about. And I'm sure you look like the scion of

mighty warriors." She turned to her companion: "Didn't I say——" and stopped. "Yes, look: you were Stephen Joyous Death just now, coolly distributing death among the sand-eels with your hook. I'm sure your ancestor hooked up the corpses of Saracens in just the same easy way. Some five hundred of them before breakfast, and a plague upon this quiet life!—what?"

"And I'm sure they smelt just as bad," said the companion, wrinkling up her nose.

"Do they smell?" inquired Stephen, abashed, and tightening down the lid of his fish-basket.

"Smell!" shrieked the hostess. "Oh, how crude a thing is the young male animal! How insensitive is his nostril! He asks if they smell."

"Well, look here, I'll take them back to our lodgings, and that's fully two miles away; and I'll bring back my father instead."

"Yes, yes, yes," shrieked the hostess; and in her abounding energy, began to push him to the door. "Go and fetch us your father."

Stephen ran down the path, much elated at having been pushed like that.

### III

And in the distance, Mr. Gallimore, as he sat upon the beach against the first grass of the hill, had dropped his book that he might float on drifting thoughts. There had passed him, a while before, a young girl whose holiday suit of white wool, close-fitting, had outlined for him her neat, straight shoulders, her ripe breast, her graceful hips and her firm active thighs. She had passed him, and lower down the beach had turned and climbed the hill with her strong, young grace, disappearing over the sky-line; and he had loved her—not because she was good, because he would never know anything of her life, but because she was young and beautiful and happy. She left with him, as did all beautiful girls, a pain at



the heart. Always they reminded him that the only perfect thing in the world was a perfect human relationship ; and that, sweep as he might the panorama of his life, he could see no such thing for him, either in the past or the future. It was to brood on this that he had dropped his book. Not a single perfect human relationship ! Ruth, though few so selfless and loyal, failed to satisfy him ; Stephen, to whom he could have given so great a love and (as he imagined) so perfect an understanding, only withdrew into his bastioned fortress and left his father without the gate, very proud of the handsome castellan, and very empty. A few jovial colleagues at the office ; a few kindly acquaintances at the church ; and that was all. But not joviality did he want, nor kindly nods and chats, but love : a mutual absorption between himself and one other—and ah, yes ! as the world of men was ordered—that “ one other ” ought to be a woman of softness and beauty. There was an innocence or a sublimation in this hunger : only give him the spiritual love and its lamps in a beautiful woman’s eyes, and he would ask no more.

So it was that every soft feminine face, as it passed, could hurt him sharply. O all fair women, who guard your beauty and enhance it with every art, do you know the pain it carries for those of us whom Romance has left on the beach disappointed ?

Warm-headed from this mental worrying, Mr. Gallimore, a few hours later, sat in the studio of Miss Magnus—for that, they learned, was the name of the noisy, jocund hostess—and talked into the eyes of Laurie Cluer, her friend. You could not help talking into her eyes, because she laid them like jars beneath your words. And suddenly those eyes tossed a rich seed into his heart, a seed that swelled quickly. Was it about to happen, the thing that he longed for—or part of it ?

He was sitting in a wicker chair, as long and easy as Indolence itself, and as profound ; the backward fall of

its seat was so tilted that the deepest depression where his main weight had now collected, seemed to be almost touching the ground. He had a rather curious sense of the ground's proximity to these, his nearest points. He felt that, if he laughed at all heartily, he would bump rhythmically on the coco-nut matting. And she was sitting on a low ottoman cushion, with her legs curled round behind her, like the tail of a mermaid round a rock. It stirred Mr. Gallimore to see her there ; and the thought that he might be on the verge of love worked a pleasing sense of enlargement and airiness in his throat. For the present, he was hardly worried by the thought that there was little possibility of so exquisite a creature's reciprocating his passion ; in a humility, no different from a boy's, he felt sure she could never do this, but he was delighted at the prospect of adoring her and knowing again the sweet unrests of love.

"You've a very handsome son," said she, turning her head towards Stephen, who was talking to Miss Magnus in the distant perspective of the studio. "Did you know it?" She had brought back her laughing eyes to his ; and he was happy to think there was nothing wilful in this damaging use of the eyes ; it seemed unconscious as a child's.

"Yes, Stephen is a good-looking boy," he agreed. One-half of his mind felt proud at this praise of Stephen, and the other tried to remember what he himself was like at seventeen.

It was his looks, explained Laurie Cluer, that had drawn and held the artist eyes of her hostess. As they had sat in their hammock chairs, staring at the empty rocks and the empty sea, Miss Magnus had suddenly cried, "Oh, what a lovely vision !" and Miss Cluer, glancing up, had seen, clearly outlined against an expanse of indigo water, the figure of a slim boy, close-clad in a white sweater and running shorts, who was alternately stooping to hook up an eel and standing erect while he



tossed it with a graceful action into the basket on his hip. Miss Magnus had declared that she was beatified by the sight ; that it was a poem, a melody, a thrust of pain ; and that, " a youth with such lines to his figure must have, simply *must* have, a face worthy of them ; it would be too grievous a blow if his features were ugly. Shall we risk it, Laurie ? Shall we risk so terrible a blow ? " And then Stephen, his soul as remote as the horizon, had strayed closer to them ; and they had seen his fair hair damped with curls, and the fine lines of his nose and his mouth. And Miss Magnus had exclaimed, " Oh my God ! Oh, Laurie, it's *too* good—too good to be true. Laurie, this day we have been greatly privileged ; we are blessed among women."

" What did she mean by that ? " asked Mr. Gallimore.

" Oh, I don't know ; she talks wildly like that sometimes. . . . But you won't tell your boy all this, will you ? " she besought, and her eyes were as full of appeal as her words. " He'll think we're such fools."

" Of course not," promised Mr. Gallimore, absently ; for his mind, quickened by her talk of beauty in lines, was apprehending the fall of her shoulder, the recession of her hip as she sat on the ottoman, and the flow of her limbs as they went round the cushion like the tail of a mermaid round her customary rock. They were a melody, certainly ; a poem ; and still more, a thrust of pain.

" Felicia wants to paint him. I suppose you were prepared for that."

" I'm sure he'll be delighted. What boy wouldn't ? " assured Mr. Gallimore ; and then, remembering that he had but ten days before him, he took a first step boldly : with a twinkle in his eyes, he said, " But I wonder at her looking afield for a model."

" What do you mean ? " asked Laurie, with uplifted eyes.

"Why doesn't she paint you? She might paint you just as you're sitting now."

"Oh, she's often painted me. When I was younger. But I'm not worth painting now."

"Which is a lie," said Mr. Gallimore.

"Which is rude," smiled she.

"Which I can't help," said Mr. Gallimore, "because the truth is, you're probably much better worth painting now than you were a year or two ago."

"Why do you think that?" asked she, patently pleased at this interesting development in the conversation.

"Because you've got more expression in your face."

She pouted. "More lines, you mean."

"More character," amended Mr. Gallimore; "and that is always a beautiful addition."

Really he was doing splendidly; he felt most satisfied with himself. It was pleasant to be offering her these elegant flatteries—to be putting them to her lips like self-made dainties on a fork. And how readily his brain was serving up these dainties! This was evidence, was it not, of a naturally quick intelligence that the dull routine of London had clouded, but rest and sunlight and the sparkle on the sea had instantly restored. Mr. Gallimore, smiling into Laurie's face, felt young and attractive and bronzed, and fonder than ever of his listener. In the depths of his mind, unacknowledged, was stirring the thought, "I shall be a fool not to go on with this. I may not start so well again." The impetus of initial success was pushing him into love.

*Acc No 54*



## CHAPTER VII

### *The Mischief Busy*

THE next afternoon, when Stephen was due to pose as Miss Magnus's model, Mr. Gallimore, avouching that he needed a walk, accompanied him to the studio. And there, when the artist and the model became involved in noisy debate and periodically entangled in the coils of constricting laughter, he turned and suggested to Laurie Cluer, "We are both out of this. Let's take pity on one another and go for a walk"; adding hastily, for he was nervous this afternoon of being a nuisance or a fool, "but perhaps you'd rather watch the picture taking shape."

"Not I," assured Miss Cluer, jumping up. "And it's too infernally hot in here."

Mr. Gallimore's heart beat quickly, as they stepped out of the bungalow into the loneliness of a deserted coast. And it beat no slower when, on their journey down the hill-side, he offered her his hand to help her over the steeper falls, in which situation she generally gave a daring jump, pressing his hand very hard in her moment of lovely alarm. Now they were on the sands and had dropped into silence, Mr. Gallimore drawing from the adjacency of this slender animal, an excitement that precluded speech. "I am only forty-six," his mind was reassuring him.

"Let's sit down for a while," said she at last. "It's too hot to walk"; and they chose a suitable recess in the hill-side where they could lean back against the warm soft grass.

To pass from walking together to sitting together is

always an invitation to greater intimacy of conversation. It is difficult to be tender when you are walking somewhat apart, your steps thrown this way and that by the exigences of the rocks and the stones ; whereas it is difficult not to be tender, when seated under the empty sky in a great loneliness of rocks and sand and sea.

"Tell me all about Persia," began Mr. Gallimore.

She told him many things of which he heard perhaps half ; because often as she talked, he was watching the movement of her lips or studying with his lately awakened sense the melody of her limbs. And it was a new melody they were playing this afternoon, for she had soon wearied of her first position against the cliff and, straightening her back, had curled both her legs under one thigh, like a mermaid on her private sands. For eight years, she told him, she had been the companion of a school-friend, the wife of a carpet merchant who had his centre and home at Hamadan, in Western Persia. They lived in one of the large houses of the place, a great white mansion set in a garden of poplars. It was a house of rugs and carpets : large carpets on the floors, little rugs lying on top of them, and carpets and rugs and prayer-mats instead of pictures hanging on the walls. And on all these carpets moved Persian or Kurdish servants, extraordinarily silently, in slippers with carpet soles.

"It must be like a scene in an opera," suggested Mr. Gallimore.

She thought a minute.

"It's more like a scene in a carpet emporium in the Tottenham Court Road."

"But it must be wonderful seeing those places and living where there is always sunshine and colour. Out of the drabness——"

"That's what I thought when Rose first asked me to go with her—when she married Jack. I was only twenty-one, and thought myself one of the luckiest girls. And for the first few months, it *was* thrilling. We went to



Hamadan from the coast on camel-back. Everything seemed wonderful at first, but afterwards. . . . Oh, just think of it ! One never meets anyone of one's own nation, except a bank-manager or two, all heavily married, of course. I never had any excitements or flirtation or any other fun. It was all right with Rose ; she was safely married like the rest."

" Were you the only white people there ? "

" Well, the Persians are not black," laughed she ; and Mr. Gallimore flushed for his question. " Oh, there were a few others ; the American Medical Missionaries, for instance. But what can you do with a Medical Missionary ? "

" Nothing, I suppose," answered Mr. Gallimore, inwardly congratulating himself that he was not of these unavailable, emasculate people. " But why do you go back ? "

" Why ? Because I don't think I've anywhere else to go. My parents are dead, and after living on soft carpets so long, and being waited on by soft-footed servants, I couldn't settle down to work in an office, even if I could do the job. No, I shall go back to the great rooms and the homesickness."

She caught her ankle behind her, and Mr. Gallimore, in considerable love, pictured her like some Eastern houri, sitting alone and pensive, on a carpet or a divan, in a room as large and vista'd as the stage at Drury Lane.

" But, thank God, Felicia gives me a good time when I come to England."

" But do you always come to this bungalow ? Is it not exchanging the loneliness of Hamadan for the loneliness of Sennen ? "

" Oh, but we have a good time before we come here. Felicia's got a flat in Chelsea, and she knows all the artists in London. So I always make her show me Life till I am surfeited with it. Then we come here for a rest cure."

Mr. Gallimore felt alarmed. From the conjunction of

the words "Life" and "Artists," with "Chelsea" hovering near by, one feared the worst. And Life that needed a rest cure!

"Life?" asked he. "What sort of life?"

"Oh, I don't think I'll tell you. I'm sure it would shock you."

"I am sure that nothing you have been associated with could shock me."

"Oh, but it would, though. You don't know anything about some of the things that go on in London."

He felt hurt. Was she aligning him with the Medical Missionaries?

"Why shouldn't I?"

"You're too nice and well brought up."

"Give me an example."

"Well, there was one amazing party we attended in the studio of—no, it wouldn't be fair to tell you his name—though it's famous all over the world. It began at half-past eleven, after the theatres, when the actors and actresses could come; people kept arriving till one o'clock, and we all sat on the floor in what would have been complete darkness, if it hadn't been for an illuminated bowl of gold-fish in the middle of the room. William Garrold, the actor, was there, and kept walking amongst us all with champagne and saying, 'For God's sake, get a shade drunk; then we shall all be jolly.' Another interesting person poured whisky into the gold-fish bowl to intoxicate the fishes. And all the women were smoking cigarettes."

"Quite an orgy," suggested Mr. Gallimore.

"Yes, quite. But I enjoyed it. I felt alive at last."

The story disturbed Mr. Gallimore. It had not been a part of his plan that the woman with whom he was to fall in love should have inner knowledge of the faster forms of living. He had conceived a—well, he had conceived several different types of woman, but not this. Still . . . plans, if necessary, could be changed. It



would be easier to make this little readjustment than to retire from an adventuring in which he had made so auspicious a start. "That is to say, of course, on condition she's been only an eye-witness and not a participant in such loose practices," he stipulated to himself. "She must be a good woman. At all costs, she must be good."

"I suppose these sort of people have very few morals?" he tendered.

"Only a very few," she agreed.

"Does Miss Magnus really approve of that sort of thing?"

"I don't know that she approves, but it certainly amuses her, and I don't expect she'd feel so strongly about it as you do."

"Yes, I *do* feel strongly about it," admitted Mr. Gallimore suddenly. He felt pleased with his austerity, and decided that it would not lessen his attractiveness. "I can understand and forgive people erring when they are in the grip of a great passion. There is even something splendid in their abandonment. But to do it out of mere frivolity! . . ."

"Oh, but, Mr. Gallimore, it's done in a passionate desire not to miss everything before it's too late!"

She stared out to sea, as she said it; and Mr. Gallimore, turning to look at her, wondered if it was to be interpreted as a confession and an appeal. And that moment he was more delightfully troubled by her than before: troubled by her trusting confidence, and by her manifest hunger for emotional experience, which called to the hunger in him. Despite the stipulation he had made to himself just now, he began to wonder whether he could not love her all the more, should she confess that she had not been perfectly good. . . . A wounded thing, she would come to him for pity and strength. . . . A pleasing picture! . . . Yes, he was prepared now to make this further readjustment in his plan.

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"I'm sure *you* wouldn't get into those ways," said he. "It would make me very unhappy to think it."

"Me?" Those eyes, opened in surprise, turned to his. "Why should you be troubled about me, one way or another?"

"Some people trouble you at first sight, don't they?"

She got up and smiled at him.

"I like that speech. I like to think I have power to trouble people at first sight. . . . Come, we had best be going back."

And the hand that she extended to help him to his feet pressed his in gratitude and affection.



## CHAPTER VIII

### *Mr. Gallimore Saves His Honour*

#### I

WHEN they re-entered the bungalow, they found that the sitting was over, and painter and model were discussing not art, but swimming. Miss Magnus and Stephen had struck a topic that yielded rich conversation, because both were in a position to imply they were really in the first flight, when it came to swimming. They vied with each other in their eagerness to arrange a communal bathe.

"We're going to have a moonlight bathe, all of us," shouted Miss Magnus to the entering couple. "Tomorrow night, I hope, while it is still so hot. We're going to get two boats and take them a mile out, and put the gentlemen's boat a modest half-mile from the ladies' while we all undress."

Mr. Gallimore was aware of a sudden acceleration of the heart and an unpleasant disarrangement of his breathing. For the purposes of official truth, he could swim; and always, when bathing from the sands, he would venture out as far as possible, to give an appearance of swimming out of his depth, but actually he maintained a steady communication with the sea's bed, taking soundings with his toe every few seconds, and, the moment he failed to establish contact, veering round and swimming to the shore with no little expedition.

"I don't know that father will care to swim a mile out," submitted Stephen.

Instantly Mr. Gallimore retorted: "Of course I will! You're not the only person that can swim a yard"; and

he turned to Laurie. "Are you a great swimmer too?"

"I'm not as good as Felicia, but we often bathe from a boat together."

"She's quite good," said Miss Magnus.

Mr. Gallimore was sorry. He would be the only one to appear at a disadvantage. Turning, he looked out of the window in the hope that a cloud might be bearing up from the sea with the promise of heavy rain and sharp cold for the remaining ten days of their holiday. There was nothing. The sky was burnished with the sun and had a durability like brass. Under it the sea appeared as little likely to lift into storms as the surface of a vast swimming bath under a hot glass roof. "But surely I can swim round and keep near the boat," he reflected. "I know I can swim my twenty yards when I am in my depth. I'll do it out of my depth. I'll do it." Really, on the firm wooden floor of the studio, it seemed quite possible. And once the ordeal was over, he would be able to dress again, with that exhilaration that comes after a frightening task has been successfully discharged and thrown behind you. Then he would be able to take Laurie in one boat, while Stephen took Miss Magnus in the other, and the two boats would row along diverging lines. He and she would be alone under moonlight on a wide sea. But before he could enter upon this delight, there was a task set for him to do: a small dragon to be overcome. He would despise himself for ever if he turned back. Such a little thing to do, after all.

"Of course, I'll come," said he. "I shall enjoy it immensely."

## II

That night as he stepped into bed he thought how pleasant would be the same action the following night when he would be taking a sense of triumph and perhaps some exalting memories into the warm embrace of the



blankets. But to-night he was restless and ill at ease ; to-night only a troubled sleep visited him ; a sleep as mentally lit and throbbing as the sleep of some *jeune premier* before his first appearance on a great stage. He woke unrefreshed ; which was a new worry, for he imagined his powers ought to have been fully re-charged by sleep, if he was to encompass the task that awaited him by moonlight. After breakfast, however, he picked up his towel and bathing costume, and told Stephen that for *his* part, whether or not they bathed by moonlight, he wasn't going to be deprived of his regular morning swim. " You ought to come too, you lazy young rascal ! " But Stephen declared that he was going to reserve all his energies for the night ; which further dismayed Mr. Gallimore ; seeming to confirm his view that a high condition and much staying-power would be necessary on that dark stretch of sea, a mile from shore.

But he was not sorry to be alone. His mind would have been too preoccupied for a companion. And a companion might have remarked that in his bathing that morning there was a character as of hard exercises and stern training. For he would have to cram into an hour's practice a training that should have been spread over years. He was going to keep at it, and at it, till he was satisfied he could swim twenty yards out of his depth. This achieved, he would lie down on his bed all the afternoon and re-charge his powers for the strain of the night.

The air seemed colder than usual as he pushed his limbs into his red-and-white-striped costume. And as he walked the first half-dozen steps into the water's breath-disturbing chill, the sea seemed a detestable arrangement and bathing a misery. He did not swim a stroke till the water was on a level with his chin. Then with a sharper catch in his breath than any yet, he started, his face towards the horizon. He could see only the miles of ocean before him ; let him imagine there was

at least a mile of it behind him. Let him imagine it was nine o'clock and moonlight. He took one, two, three, four—now he must be out of his depth—five, six, seven strokes—now he must be quite out of his depth—it made him gasp—panic shouted that he should turn about and finally withdraw from his unfortunate commitment—but he forged on—ten, eleven, twelve, thirteen, fourteen strokes—staying his shuddering will by repeating, “You can do it—you can do it . . .”—now he must be ten yards out of his depth—fifteen, sixteen, seventeen strokes—good God! he veered round and with accelerated, some might say immensely accelerated, movements, fought his way back to the safer waters. As his toe, which had been taking its soundings with an increasing regularity and speed, at last scraped the ground, he stood up on the firm sands, his heart thumping with breathlessness but full-inflated with a triumph. “I shall do that ten times, imagining I am swimming out from the boat and back again. I shall only need to do it once to-night, and then I can joke about the cold.”

He did it ten times, and though each of the ten times had its sharp climax of torture, he emerged from the water in a glow of satisfaction. “I have proved I can do it. If I can do twenty yards out of my depth here, I can do it a mile out. There is no difference. There is absolutely no difference at all. No difference between swimming with six feet of water beneath you and swimming with sixty fathoms.”

But a horrid doubt in the back of his mind protested that there was a very distinct difference. And all the afternoon this doubt increased in power, shaking him with most unpleasant tremors. By three o'clock he was counting the hours between that moment and half-past nine when presumably the ordeal would be over. At four his tea tasted unpleasant in his mouth, and his throat nearly refused to swallow his bread and butter. After tea he lay down again for a further re-charging; but,



accepting the truth that sleep would never invade so turbulent a brain, he got up again, and, going to the window, looked at the sea. "It's strange," thought he, "that a man will prefer the risk of death to taking the tiniest wound to his pride. It's rather fine in its way." But as he looked at the sea, his stomach turned empty, and his bowels felt a vacuum.

## III

These intestinal disturbances of the afternoon were as nothing to the evolutions that happened inside him, when at nine o'clock Stephen was rowing him in a boat farther and farther from the land. "You row, Stephen," he had said; "you are younger." It was a last effort at resting and re-charging. Thank Heaven it was dark: no one would be able to see if he was white. And thank Heaven the ladies could penetrate to none of his true emotions through the curtain of banter and gaiety that he was hanging between the two boats. (What is bravery if this be not: Mr. Gallimore, whose heart was only a degree less dead with despair than any of the hearts collected in a French tumbril, throwing his jokes across the darkness to a happy pair in a neighbouring pleasure-boat?) How much farther were they going to row? It must be half-past nine now, and the land was hardly visible except for the lights of Sennen village. The moon was high and brilliant against the final blue of the sky. The stars were diamond hard in their total indifference. Undoubtedly the immensities of the sky consoled him, with their assurance that he was infinitely unimportant and his sufferings immeasurably brief. Lord have pity, how much farther were they going to row? But what did it matter? There was no difference between having a mile of sea between you and Sennen, and having two miles; no difference between having sixty fathoms of sea between your sounding toe and the ocean-bed, and having six hundred fathoms. He did not

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know whether he wanted to postpone the moment of trial or to have it come quickly and pass behind.

"Here, you row a bit, Father," demanded Stephen.

"All right." He stepped into the seat and took an oar. What did it matter?

He rowed in silence.

"Should we stop now?" called Miss Magnus at last.

"Yes, I think so," answered he. "We don't want to get too tired."

All began to unship their oars.

"We must rest awhile," he said cheerily. "My arms are aching."

But Stephen would have no resting. He said he would burst if he didn't get in, and began to dismantle himself.

"Shoo! Shoo!" shrieked Miss Magnus. "Pull away! Pull away! You mustn't undress before us."

"I'll remove the graceless cub," laughed Mr. Gallimore; and he put both oars into place, glad of the excuse to postpone his own undressing.

At a sufficient distance he rested on his oars. Stephen, alas, was already naked and dragging on his costume.

"I tell you what," said his father, knowingly. "When we're both undressed, I'll pull our boat close to theirs—to about ten yards distance, say—and then the ladies can swim from one to the other. I fancy Miss Cluer isn't so strong a swimmer as Miss Magnus."

"Right you are," agreed Stephen, and thereupon stood with one foot on a seat and one on the gunwale, and dived most gracefully into the sea—nearly, however, capsizing the boat. It rocked right and left, and in the unforeseen commotion Mr. Gallimore lost an oar.

"Oh . . ." he began, and tried to fish for the lost oar with the blade of its partner. But Stephen, whose skill was somehow a further disheartenment, came to the surface, and swam with it to the boat. "Hi," called he, "you've lost an oar."

Mr. Gallimore undressed, and rowed in his red-and-



white bathing dress towards the ladies. They, thank goodness, were already in the water and not waiting to applaud his dive. He did not intend to dive. He intended to slip over the side, and let go at his own chosen moment. He would let go, and swim his ten yards to the ladies' boat, just when all eyes were on him. With a carefully measuring eye he stopped his boat at what he judged to be ten yards from the ladies' boat. He was sorry it looked so meagre a distance in that wide expanse of sea. Deciding that he had best get into the water before the boats drifted to eleven yards apart, or even twelve, he pulled in the oars and put a preliminary leg over the gunwale. Never before had he realized that it was so difficult a matter to get out of a little rocking boat into the sea. Or perhaps I should say, never before had he realized it was so easy a matter ; for in a thoughtless moment he rested all his weight on the gunwale, and the boat immediately turned on its beam ends and pitched him into the sea. An oar and Stephen's trousers came out on the same adventure with him ; but he did not see them. In that moment of intellectual and physical overthrow, he travelled some way under water, turned a string of blasphemies into a chain of ejaculatory prayers, fought for life, and came to the surface with a mouth and nose full of the sea. He shot out a desperate arm for something to cling to, and closed his fingers on an oar. It immediately showed that it had no intention of thus supporting him, by sinking blade first. Still holding it, however, and indeed doing a "press-up" on it, like a one-armed acrobat on the trapeze, he shot out the other arm for something less treacherous. This time he caught hold of a thick upper leg—Miss Magnus's. Perhaps it was as well that it was Miss Magnus whom he was thus grasping, and not Stephen ; because, had it been Stephen, I fear he would have maintained his hold and improved it to a securer embrace, but when he found it was a lady whom he was thus insulting, not death itself was more unthinkable,

and he instantly let go. Miss Magnus, hardly aware whose path she had crossed, swam on with her face beneath the water.

They say that the best way to learn to swim is to be pitched into the deep end, and certainly Mr. Gallimore, seeing some five yards away the boat that had ejected him, swam to it at express speed. He caught its side : this brought it down towards him, and the second oar rolled noisily in his direction, and he muttered, " Damn ! it's turning over again." But his legs floated up under the keel, and some of his weight being thus thrown on to the sea, the boat righted. Mr. Gallimore looked round. Mercifully no one seemed to have watched his tumble into the water or to have noticed anything unusual in his disporting since ; they were much too busy splashing one another, swimming under water at each others' legs, and shrieking with laughter. His breath returned ; and with it the realization that, if he would prove to all that he could swim in the deep seas, he had yet to make his journey across to the other boat. Well, he would do it when they turned and looked his way. Almost he wished they would look quickly.

" Hi ! Father."

It was Stephen's voice ; Stephen and the ladies were looking at him as he clung foolishly to the boat, his feet under it, so that the damned thing must appear to be sitting on his lap. That they should see in him matter for laughter was not to be tolerated ; now—this moment—he must prove his prowess. Saying to himself, " You can do it, you can do it, you proved it this morning," he struck out for the ladies' boat. But he had not gone six strokes before his merciless brain hinted to him that those sixty fathoms of water were now beneath his suspended body ; he began to gasp ; elegance went from his stroke ; and he thrashed towards his goal. Panic had almost sunk him, as his fingers touched its side. He clutched it wildly, pulled himself up on it, so that it tilted violently



towards him and he said, "Hell! O Hell!" as he saw a selection of ladies' garments being decanted into the sea. He quickly brought up his legs, recalling that this would right the boat; and with his free hand recovered the decanted garments. A glance round showed that the others were too busy displaying their accomplishments to be interested in his movements; for which vanity and selfishness of theirs might God be praised, since it enabled him to peep into the boat, learn that there was a trifle of standing water in its bottom, and put the wet garments to float there.

What was he to do now? Swim back to his own boat? Oh, never again, never again. He couldn't. But he couldn't hang on this boat for ever; and he couldn't very well get in and row himself back to his clothes—that would be too absurd; and he would not—he simply would not submit to the indignity of being towed back to his own boat. No, he would have to do that terrible swim over again. There was no help for it, and O cruelty! the distance between the two boats had manifestly increased, probably because he had pushed them about so vigorously. Well, he must do it. He must cover the distance. It was not yet twenty yards; and he had done twenty yards several times this morning. Be quick—he had best be quick; the boats were drifting. And the others had turned their faces to him. With ejaculatory prayers he struck out once more. He swam much too fast, for he was synchronizing a revolution of his arms with every "O God help me! O God help me! O God help me!" But he might do it—yes, he might do it—he was undoubtedly getting nearer the boat. "O God give me a few more strokes, give me a few more strokes, give me a few more strokes." But just then Stephen, like a young dolphin, swam right across his path, and Mr. Gallimore cried to him, "Get out of the way, you b—— fool!" Fortunately Stephen's ears were under water, and he didn't hear. Two—three more

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strokes, and with unspeakable relief, Mr. Gallimore touched the sides of his boat. It was done ; the deed was done. In an exaltation he clambered in, struggling somehow on to one of the seats, and seizing hold as he did so, of the few things that looked like leaving the boat. He stood up in it like a conqueror in his chariot. He waved to the others. He shouted to them over the waters, and his shout, whatever its words, was really the "Io ! Io !" of a victor. "I shan't go in any more," sang he. "It's too cold. Too cold. And I'm not so young as you three children. Ahoy, Stephen : swim to that oar. It must have rolled out of the boat when I dived." There was no happier man on all the seas.



## CHAPTER IX

### *Two Floating Confessionals*

#### I

"I'VE told you all about myself," said Miss Cluer. "It's your turn to tell me all about yourself."

They were alone, Mr. Gallimore rowing and Laurie Cluer reclining in the stern. Stephen and Miss Magnus were rowing back to the bungalow to search among her "properties" for some garment that would deputize for his trousers; for though the jettisoned oar had been recovered, the trousers were seen no more.

"What's your profession?" asked Miss Cluer.

Mr. Gallimore reflected: if his love prospered, she would have to know all about his narrow life; but if it didn't, if it died at the end of his holiday, as in his heart of hearts he feared it must, then he would like to walk in her memory as a man of substance and power.

"What would you think I am?" he temporized.

"I should say you ought to have been an artist, but were diverted to something more prosaic."

This gave instant satisfaction to Mr. Gallimore, and he saw that he could not do better than follow it up.

"You're astonishingly clever! Yes, I suppose I am now what you'd call a merchant."

Her eyes shone at him in the starlight.

"But that must be thrilling! I've often thought, when I've been despairing in Persia at my impotence and *nonentity* (as I call it) how much I should have liked to be a big business woman. I can see the romance of it—watching the markets—advancing at the right moment—retiring judiciously—now buying and now sell-

ing—like a general in his tent with his maps spread before him and his dispatch-riders waiting. Oh yes, it must be infinitely fascinating.”

“It is,” agreed Mr. Gallimore, whose imagination was staring admiringly, perhaps longingly, at this picture. He would have liked to stop with that non-committal “It is,” because he was not fond of lying; but unfortunately his lips, with no clear order from his brain, proceeded, “That has always been my consolation.”

“What is the character of your merchandise?”

“The character, eh?” He paused; and a slight dampness began to form on his brow. “Oh, everything—literally everything, I suppose. . . . Have you ever heard of Leicester’s?”

“What? Leicester’s, near Sloane Square? Are you Leicester’s? Oh, Felicia will be thrilled.”

“I’m not one of the principals, you understand.” With this concession he felt that he had preserved some fragments of his honour, given verisimilitude to his story, and at the same time left the implication, for whosoever might be mistaken enough to pick it up, that he really came next after the principals. “You might call me a sort of Chief Secretary. Of course a great firm like Leicester’s with ramifications all over the world needs about forty secretaries. I am their—their chief.”

“Oh, I should love to have forty assistants! I’m sure you’re awfully good to them.”

“I try to be.”

“And where do you live?”

“I had to live near town, so I chose Bealing.”

Had her nose wrinkled?

“I don’t like Bealing, Mr. Gallimore. I’ve seen Bealing Common from the trams.”

“Oh, but,” demurred he, “it has some fine houses on the south side”; which, as we have seen, was strictly true.

“And what does Stephen do? Is he going to Oxford?”



## TWO FLOATING CONFESSIONALS

"Well, no. . . . You see, I had such influence at Leicester's that it seemed absurd for him not to take advantage of it. He has just come into the firm to learn its ropes. I hope he may one day step into my shoes."

"Yes, I think you are right. He'll probably make much more money in business than ever he would in any of the professions."

Mr. Gallimore, who had rested on his oars, wiped his brow with his sleeve.

"Yes. The professions are no great catch these days," murmured he.

"You're tired. Let's just drift a bit." Was it that she had conducted her examination before encouraging him? "Come and sit beside me."

He unshipped his oars.

## II

Meanwhile Stephen's boat had changed its course. Stephen with a rug roped round his middle had decided that he liked this kilt and need not go back for more clothes. He had turned the boat's head to the north, where lay a wreck, about whose gloomy ribs he wanted to paddle in the moonlight. Miss Magnus sat in the stern and admired him as he plied the oars gently. Possibly with her good heart and his good looks, and the moonlight, she felt very motherly towards him, for after such a silence as only Stephen, the remote, could enjoy without noticing it, she said, "Tell me all about yourself."

He awoke and smiled.

"What sort of thing about myself?"

"What do you expect to do in life?"

"I expect to do nothing," he answered, with suitable bitterness.

Miss Magnus laughed. "A noble resolve. Are we a cynic?"

"We are not. We should have liked to do something, but we know when the odds are too heavy against us."

"How 'too heavy'? No odds are too heavy for youth."

"That's pretty, but 'tisn't true. Say a youth found himself in Dartmoor, wouldn't he be a fool if he didn't decide that the odds were too heavy for him to escape."

"Oh, for seventeen, you *are* a realist."

Stephen, unsure what she meant, turned round to see how near was the wreck. They were a cable's length from its tilted stern, and he could see through its gashed side the blue moonlight filling the hull.

"Do you mean," continued Miss Magnus, "that your circumstances are an unescapable prison?"

"Yes."

"Tell me how."

She asked it softly, and a desire moved in Stephen to reveal the deepest places of his heart, his follies and his sins; to tell her thoughts that he had never told to father, mother, or boy-friend. Such is the influence of moonlight on the sea, and a pleasant melancholy, and a sympathetic Miss Magnus.

"I've only seen it in the last few months," said he; "but there's a certain class of Society from which it is extraordinarily difficult to escape. It's ours. You see, Father's only got his three hundred a year as an Assistant Manager at Leicester's, so he could only afford to send me to a type of school that ought to be wiped off the map. At sixteen, just when I think I might have begun to see something in the meaningless books and get something out of them, despite the masters—I had to go out to work in Father's office. Twelve-and-six a week, if you please. And for that I have to go up to town daily in a smelly, smoky train; and I get back about seven, when I am much too tired to begin my education from the beginning."

"What would you have liked to be?"

"I think I should have liked to be a soldier."

"But so young? Can't you yet do it?"



## TWO FLOATING CONFESSIONALS

"No," snapped he, with finality. "I couldn't ask Father to help me any more. I shouldn't like to."

"Couldn't you work for one of the professions?"

Stephen shook his head. He let the boat drift under the hull of the wreck, its oars tilted skywards like wings.

"I've thought of that, too. But the task is too appalling. I'd have to do three years' work before I could even matriculate, and I'm so tired at night, Miss Magnus."

"Others have tried and done it."

"Yes, but we've only heard the pretty tales of the one or two who've tried and succeeded—and selfish, bullying brutes they've generally been. No one tells the stories of the hundreds and thousands who've tried and given it up."

It was true. Miss Magnus had no answer.

"Besides," continued he, "it doesn't seem worth it. Even if I reached some profession, what would it mean? Without any private means, I should only be improving my position by a hundred or so a year, and a little more respect from the world. 'Tisn't worth the terrible journey of getting there. . . . Besides, my tastes don't lie with law or medicine or those sort of things. I might run away and enlist and take the billion-to-one chance of getting a commission, but two things stop me there: first, I'm too incurably snobbish to run the risk of being a ranker all my life; and secondly, where I am at present, I am at least certain of earning enough, in due course, to keep my mother in our sort of feeble gentility, when—if anything happens to Father. . . . And *that* I'm determined to do," added he, his faint braggadocio peeping to-night from its hiding-place.

"I understand," murmured Miss Magnus.

"No, it's easy to be high-flown about one's idea of what youth can do; but some of us know when we're caught."

Miss Magnus answered nothing for a little while. Stephen stared at the moonlit wreck, as he drew the boat

beyond its bows ; and she trailed her fingers in the water, or rearranged the cushion in her seat. Presently she said :

“ Such bitterness, Stephen—do you mind being called that ? It can have only one explanation. You are in love.”

The sentence brought him completely out of his remote thoughts and into the boat with Miss Magnus. It was potent as a liqueur ; but he drank it at a draught ; and like a liqueur so taken, it filled him with a mellow exaltation and a yet stronger desire to speak of secret things. The confidences were best introduced by smile and the refusal to say “ No.”

“ Come, who is she ? ” triumphed Miss Magnus.

He told her all. And when the tale was exhausted, he added, “ But I am beginning to see that it will all come to nothing. I should never ask her to marry me unless I could afford to give her the luxury to which she has been accustomed ; and that, I see, is out of the programme. I don’t even want to know her now. I’ve nothing to offer her, and so I reckon it would be an insult to offer her my love.”

“ Nothing to offer her ! Oh, fool, fool ! . . . Stephen, you say you have neither capital nor education. Don’t you realize that you have at least one other form of capital ; pretty richly ? ”

“ Health, do you mean ? ”

“ Health—pity us, no ! We’re most of us healthy. I’m healthy. I mean something that the huge majority of us would swap our education for, *and* most of our wealth, *and* quite a lot of our health.”

“ What is it ? ”

“ No, no, no. I shan’t tell you. It’d spoil you to know. Being selfish, I don’t want to spoil you till you leave us. Perhaps I may spoil you at your holiday’s end, if I think it best for your happiness.”



## III

Mr. Gallimore sat in the stern with Miss Cluer, and the boat drifted. She said nothing, and he said nothing. He began to feel uncomfortable. Was she waiting for him to make the first advance ; and if he did, would she tolerate an embrace ? But supposing any such thought were far from her, how awful the blunder ! She would froth over with indignation, and how dreadfully embarrassing would be the subsequent voyage to the shore ; how awkward the rest of the holiday ! They might even tell Stephen about his father's effrontery, God-a-mercy !

It was a disappointment that his head should be housing a wrangling debate instead of the silent thoughts of love. At one moment he was ashamed of his cowardice, and at another proud of his respect for women and his recoil from offending them. If only she would make the first advance—give him a hint. She must have learned by now that he was one of the sensitive sort. But she just sat there like a—like a stuffed ninny. He cleared his throat to speak.

“What did you say ?” asked she.

Her quickness to speak might have seemed encouraging, if it hadn't instantly unnerved him.

“Nothing. . . . No, I didn't say anything.”

It was, of a truth, getting very uncomfortable. Should he take her hand ? Such an action would submit itself, if it were proven an error, to an unemotional construction. Several times he braced his will to do this, but his hand remained disobedient at his side. “I must do *something*.” How much easier it was to be a woman, and able to leave the initiative to the man. Come ! he had swum his twenty yards to win her : let him not withdraw from this.

He took her hand. Nothing happened—the skies did not fall. She just left it in his without comment, nor did the hand itself tell of her unspoken feelings by so much as the tiniest tremble ; it just lay there as inert as

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any other article he might have picked up in the boat, and now that he had it, he wondered what to do with it.

"Are you cold?" he asked, as an explanation of what he was doing with it.

"No," she answered; "are you?" perhaps as a help towards explaining his use of her hand.

"No."

He dropped it. One could not hold it for ever. Would it never be time to go home? She replaced her hand on her lap, and he elected to feel injured. "Oh, well, if she won't encourage me, she won't. I'm not the brutal, insensitive kind that rushes in uninvited. . . . It's not that I want her to do anything *bold*. That would only repel me, for I have never cared for the bold type of woman. I am not that sort. But a little something she ought to do: a man of sensitiveness and delicacy can't do everything himself. If only she'd just give me one affectionate look, or just rest her head upon my shoulder, as if she were tired, or make some movement like that—instead of this dam-silly sitting here with a dam-silly smile on her face. I don't like people who smile when one doesn't know what they're smiling about. . . . I cannot—I simply cannot force my attentions on *any* woman. It's not my nature. I am not made that way, and I never have been, and she ought to see it. It's her fault—her fault every time. . . . It serves her right."

So they drifted in a silence that was unbroken till she murmured at last, "Here they come, Stephen and Felicia," and Mr. Gallimore heard a faint plash of oars, a sound so beautiful in the moonlight that it played sadly on his heart, speaking of the undiminishable disparity between the perfect joys a man can picture and the poor, troubled things he can achieve.



## CHAPTER X

### *The Mischief Done*

#### I

WHAT are fourteen days by the sea? Breath that is gone on the wind. Too few for perfect happiness; their beginning is but the beginning of their end, their middle is flushed with pain at the flight of time, and their end is inevitable sorrow. We arrive on Saturday, and the arriving is delightful, so ready are we to envelop ourselves in the illusion that we are to have fourteen days of perfect happiness, when, in truth, we shall have but three. Perhaps not three, for the next day is Sunday, and Sunday hardly counts. Perhaps Monday and Tuesday are the only perfect days of such a holiday; days of exploration and planning, which are the two absolute joys that humanity is allowed. On the fourth day, alas! over all imaginative men the shadow of the end has already fallen: it is Wednesday, and Wednesday to Saturday implies but ten days more—nay, but nine whole days, for on Saturday we travel the long route home, than which nothing can be more distressing. Nine whole days! You see how the good round ten is broken into, and we are in the single figures. Pass Thursday—pass in that deliberate, desperate enjoyment which is so different a quality from spontaneous, care-free delight; come Friday, and as it waxes towards noon, ere we are dry from our bathe, we remember that there remains now but a week of good round days. Barely that, unless you can call next Friday a round day, in a desperate forgetfulness that it is dark with packing. Saturday: Saturday is heavy with the shadow off its

namesake next week, whose whole length will be rumbled over and crushed by the train from Penzance to Paddington. And Sunday : don't talk to us of Sundays ; what place have Sundays in a fortnight of holiday ; do we want rest from holidays ? We may try to fly them, but it is not possible ; though we take the winds of the morning and remain in the uttermost parts of the sea, we cannot escape their sober looks. To enter on Monday is, by admission of the calendar, to cut into a good cake whose Saturday end has already been nibbled. Tuesday, I dare swear, is wet ; and if so, it is the cruellest rain that ever fell. And be the next days never so fine, they are tinged with sadness, for we can only see them as the beautiful fragments of a thing that is broken. Now it is Thursday, and the landlady is bringing in a pile the sweet-smelling, sun-dried garments from the laundry of these parts, so that we may pack them to-morrow. Heigho, we must pack them to-morrow, and packing, do you remember, was such a lovely word some thirteen days ago ! No, as I live, we will not pack to-morrow. It will be our last whole day, and shall it be spoilt by packing ? Listen : let us lift the trunk lids and pack to-night.

But you may pack on Thursday night, as Mr. Gallimore and Stephen did, and still you will not cheat to-morrow of its power to hurt. It remains most dazzlingly Friday. It was more deeply dyed as Friday when the sun was past the meridian and dropping to the sea, and Stephen and his father were walking along the sands to take the ladies their good-byes. Both were silent. Stephen was thinking of the long days at the office with the 8.15 up-train for their entry and the 6.15 down-train for their exit, and the one bright luncheon hour that bisected them. And here before his eyes was the indifferent sun shining on a limitless sea and the waves whispering up the sands as they would be to-morrow and all the days ahead. Mr. Gallimore was sunk in a secret but deeply



appreciated melancholy : this was good-bye, and he loved Laurie Cluer ; of that he had long been sure ; he had submitted to the fatal truth after that moonlight night on the sea, when she had kept him doubting of her response, giving neither encouragement nor rebuff. Walking up and down his bedroom that night, he had exhaustively sifted his emotions, and finally decided, " Yes, I am afraid I love her. . . . Yes, I am convinced of it." She had played the same tactics ever since, the curious smile hovering at her lips the next morning, and peeping a hundred times during the following days. For Mr. Gallimore they had been days of exquisite unrest ; and so now he was well satisfied with what his holiday had given him. At this moment he was going to the sharpest pain of all, and I have a fancy that there were few happier men than he.

" There they are ! They are looking for us," said Stephen.

There they were, standing on the path below the bungalow, two figures in light feminine colours, watching the approach of the men.

" Too sad ! " shrieked Miss Magnus, as soon as they were near enough to hear. " Too sad ! Too sad ! "

They grinned back, and when they were standing on the path, Miss Cluer said with a pout, " I think it's beastly ! Just as we were getting to know each other so well ! " Her smile played at her mouth, giving Mr. Gallimore a first sample of the sweet pains that memory would deal from its store during all the days to come. There was some foolish talk, noisy with unreal laughter ; and a last tea in the studio ; and then the time had come to shake hands and say farewell. Fortunately for Mr. Gallimore, Miss Magnus and Stephen were already walking down the path ; and that man were no deluded fool who should suspect that Miss Cluer had of her purpose lingered behind. Mr. Gallimore took her hand, and showed no sign of releasing it.

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"Good-bye," said she, her eyes lighting up. "You'll think of me sometimes, won't you? Think of me on my high Persian tableland, beyond the mountains—among my poplars and my carpets."

"Miss Cluer . . ." he began, being on the point of a declaration. His hand pressed hers spasmodically.

She spoke before he could speak.

"If you like to take pity on a lone woman, you can write to me sometimes."

Ah, write: yes, it would be easier to write something. "Of course I will," promised he. "Of course I will"; and unwittingly he was now shaking her hand up and down.

"I feel I shall see you again," she added. "It cannot be that we should meet like this, and never again."

With a smile, so that his next sentence might pretend to be a gallantry, she knowing, none the less, that it was a sincere statement of his pain, he said:

"It is that alone which reconciles me to departure."

"Quite," said Miss Cluer, inadequately.

"How long will it be before you return to England again?"

"Six years at least."

"Six years! I shall then be—let's see—forty-eight."

"And I six years uglier."

"Six years more beautiful."

She put her hand on his shoulder and gently pushed him towards the door. Like his son, he was happy in being thus pushed: it seemed to assign to her certain rights in him.

## II

Down where the path to the cliff reached the sands Stephen was saying good-bye to Miss Magnus.

"Look here, you promised that when we said good-bye you would tell me what particular capital I had that most people would give their eyes to possess."



## THE MISCHIEF DONE

"Have you remembered that, Stephen?"

"Yes, I want to know."

"You mean to say you can't think?"

"No, since you say it's not health or any of those silly things."

"Stephen, do you shave?"

He hesitated and coloured.

"A little."

"Well, look into your shaving-glass, and it will tell you; and then look in the long mirror in the wardrobe, and it will tell you the same story."

His colour spread and deepened.

"There now! I've said a stupid thing. But I mean well. I always mean well. Stephen, I don't want you to miss your chances with your Edith, just because you're too humble and diffident. Don't be afraid of her; you have that to offer her which not one in a thousand has. I think your case is exceptional, really—oh now, I am saying sillier and sillier things. But I *do* want you to try your chance with her. Don't be afraid of your poverty. Love can quite likely crash through that; or it ought to. . . . Of course, it's only a boy and girl love, and won't last; but I think that's true of ninety-nine loves in a hundred, even when we're discreet and old. So be happy, both of you, for a little while. Don't miss a beautiful thing through shyness. . . . Yes, yes, nothing will come of it, perhaps, but it'll be a lovely memory for you both, till the end. The more we have of such memories the better. That's what I said to Laurie only a few days ago. I said, 'He's not happy, poor lamb. Give him something to dream about—what he's longing for; it'll do him no harm, and make him happy—perhaps for life.'"

"Was that about me?"

"No, no, no. It was *à propos* of—of nobody you know—of a youthful lover of hers, a wealthy young city merchant—the Chief Secretary of something or other.

## THE OLD TREE BLOSSOMED

Go back to your Edith ; if she can't have you openly, she'll have you secretly. What girl of sixteen wouldn't ? *Sh !* Here's your father and Laurie ! ”

A few more farewells, and father and son were walking back along the sands, often turning round to wave to the ladies, who stood for a long time on the path beneath the bungalow, watching them. They were watching them as they might a couple of lambs going home to the fold.

### III

And here a fable. I have this minute invented it, and yet it is as true as most stories in the world. Like Plato of old, who, when his speculations soared into mysteries too profound for rational statement, would strive to image in a fable some shadows of what he saw, I fall back upon symbols, as I cast my eyes upward on those two watching figures and speculate about Miss Magnus and Miss Laurie Cluer. Once upon a time—though that is a poor beginning, because these things happened in the timelessness of Eternity—once, then, in the ever-present Now, that lovely boy, Young Mischief, was at play on the sands by the sea. It was a fitting place for him to play, because the sun with its burning-glass was trying to dazzle the whole flocks of little waves ; the ripples were coming up and tickling the cliffs in risible places ; and the winds were addressing their impish attention to sea, sands, rocks, and cliffs, blowing, so to speak, down the universal neck ; all of which things were a delight to him. But there was another on the sands, Ancient Pity ; for she is ever where there is gaiety and play. Moreover, the whole scene was very beautiful, and she is ever where Beauty is. And there was flotsam and jetsam on the intertidal sands, and she is ever among them. But when I speak of Young Mischief and Ancient Pity, think not that I mean that the one was fresh and young and the other old and bent ; I simply mean that they were both the same



age, since both were ageless, but it is meet, is it not, to speak of Pity as being as old and wise as Eternity, and of Mischief as being as young and foolish as the same. For, you see, the whole *corpus* of Logical Law is a mass of lies ; and those who have attained to a better knowledge know that you can predicate of everything both such-and-such and its opposite. In the same style, Mischief was not strictly a boy, nor Pity a she, since in the eternal spaces of which I write, these things have no meaning. They were both lovely ; and as I picture them on their sands, I know not which I admire the more. It is a matter of mood, that is all ; as is every attribution of praise or dispraise in this world ; which shows that if only we could stand before everything and view it from its proper angle, we should see that everything is beautiful ; but since this can only be done by one who is ubiquitous, we must leave it to God.

They saw each other, and loved, these two. And because they were infinite beings their love could know no bounds ; they could not endure that at any point or in any sense they should be separate, as all human lovers must be ; some more perfect unity must be theirs. But how ? They sat on a rock and discussed how. And lo ! a man approached them who looked like an artist ; and he sat at their side and heard of their distressing condition. Then, being, like all artists, a professional Enchanter, he made them the following offer : " If in the completeness of your love you are willing to lose your present identities and be merged into a new single creature, I will accomplish it for you. Only sleep to-night hand in hand, and with the dawn not you shall awake, but a new creature. Are you ready for this ? " Be sure they declared they were ready.

So a darkness fell along the seaboard ; and what happened in that darkness no man can say ; but when light flooded it again, it lifted the eyelids of a lovely creature who was lying where the lovers had lain. She

blinked ; she sat up and stretched her arms ; she stood upon her feet and stretched her arms towards the sky ; she tossed back her hair ; she felt full of mischief, and glanced at the headland, because she knew that round it and beyond was our human world where she could create all manner of interesting trouble ; and she felt full of pity, and looked at the headland again, because she knew that in that world round the corner there was discontent and unfulfilment and many other such things on which her pity could pour itself out everlastingly ; so, knowing these indubitable facts, she gave a small leap of delight and ran and ran, all naked as she was, till she was only a spot against the dark headland ; she ran round the corner and was never seen in those immortal regions again.

Doubtless in the world to which she came she covered her nakedness with divers garments and disguises, and found house-room in many men and many women, and in all good artists ; and certainly she peeped from the eyes of Miss Magnus, Laurie Cluer, and Ruth Gallimore.

That is the fable ; and upon my troth, children, if you can make head or tail of it, good luck to you ; for there is a pretty fancy in it somewhere.



## CHAPTER XI

### *A Very Short Chapter*

#### I

**I**T was nearly dark when the Gallimores arrived at Waldron Avenue ; and Stephen went early to bed that he might think of to-morrow morning. Sunday, and a glimpse of Edith again ! And now he was going to try to make her acquaintance ; frankly admitting what he was ; and unashamed of everything. He dreamed of her when he slept ; a most intimate dream, whose memory was a warm glow when he awoke. Daylight filled the room with the peculiar brightness of a fine Sunday. He dressed carefully, for in an hour or two Edith would see him again, as she passed into church. Probably, after two weeks of wondering what had become of him, she would give a quick, interested glance his way.

Too impatient to wait for church time, he left the house after breakfast and hurried towards Studio Road. Hardly had he turned into it before, by a mercy in things, a distant sight prepared him for the coming blow. What was that fixed to the walls of her garden ? A board ? He ran ; and drawing nearer, saw that the higher windows were curtainless and blind. Now he knew what he would see when he reached the board. And he read it dully : "TO LET UNFURNISHED." Oh, when had she gone ? Impatience would brook no waiting. "Apply Ranger and Clare." With rapid strides, and a rapider heart, he set off for the offices of Ranger and Clare, in the High Street. He knocked at their side door. No answer. Then did no one live here on Sundays ? A second knock, loud with despair, and a disposition to turn away. But some one was coming. The door, opening, discovered a man in his Sunday suit and shirt sleeves.

"So sorry to trouble you," said Stephen, "but I have come all the way from the West to see Mrs. Ruhlmann of Studio Road, only to find her gone. Could you tell me her new address? It's urgent."

"Ruhlmann. I can find out for you," said the man. "Step inside. It's in Germany somewhere."

"Germany?"

"Yes, they were German. Bankers, I think. And Mrs. Ruhlmann decided to go back after Mr. Ruhlmann died. Didn't you know?"

"No, I know nothing about them. I am only a messenger."

"Well, I'll get you their address."

"Oh, don't trouble. It's not much use now."

## II

Full as usual: the 8.15 to town. Or there was one seat. Stephen, who since the blow of yesterday had been very gentle and kind to everybody, told his father to take it. He hung to the luggage rack and swayed as he was borne to his work. "Gone to Germany. Gone to Germany," beat the wheels of the train; "Gone to Germany," puffed the engine ahead. "Well, that's what you call a blow in the solar plexus," said he to himself, finding strength in the comedy of slang. "That's about put the happy lid on it!" She, the symbol of all that he hoped to win, had gone out like a lamp; like a coastal light. It was an omen. He looked at his father sitting rather torpidly in his seat, and envied him. Best to be fifty, nearly fat, and quite freed from the hungers of youth; to be where one would arrive at last: settled down, with one's stipend, one's home, and one's children.

But Mr. Gallimore, staring out at the tunnels, was thinking of Laurie Cluer, and how she had said, "Remember me sometimes on my high tableland of Persia—among my carpets and my poplars," and he was striving to find phrases for the letter he would write to her.



PART II  
*ROMANCE IS WINNING*





## CHAPTER I

### *A Major Sensation*

NOT alone for the sweets of love had Mr. Gallimore hungered since his twentieth year, but for notoriety and power. By the time he was fifty, however, while his appetite for love was no whit quenched, his hunger for fame had inevitably dulled. One had need to be a greater fool than Mr. Gallimore if, at fifty, one had not abandoned the dream of a world-wide fame. Still, in its diminished shape, the need for notoriety was always with him. It had made him a sidesman at St. Philip and St. James's Church. It had made him, during the psalms, cast thoughtful eyes on the churchwarden's wand. It had made him, though he could ill spare the time, accept the treasurership of the local Conservative Association. It had lifted him to the Committee of the local Literary Society. And it often set him grumbling to Ruth that he was not invited to stand for election as a guardian or a councillor.

There is much that is attractive about the office of a sidesman. For a business man it renders his Sunday church-going, which would else be intolerable, a pleasure. Every conscientious father likes to set a lofty example of morality and religion to his family, and if only he can become a sidesman, the irksomeness of the duties involved in such an example is very considerably mitigated. His dressing for Divine Service, his arranging of waistcoat-slip and spats, his polishing of the toes of his boots, and his brushing of his silk hat—these things take on a pleasure that is as much beyond the pleasure of unofficed men as his prospects of walking all over the church and

in view of every part of the congregation are better than theirs of sitting confined in a single pew. Boots on a Sunday morning at half-past ten, when the bells begin to ring, are fascinating things. The walk to church through the sunlight, with one's family about one, is a satisfying walk, lit by quiet anticipation. Every one likes to perform kindnesses, and it is an unfailing pleasure to lead the people of God, as they come in, to the best seats you can find for them. Every one likes to speak with special knowledge and authority, and it is a pleasure to whisper those ladies out of the churchwardens' pew, which they have entered in error, and to smile them into a safer place. Every one likes to see reverence and order, and when the service has begun, it is a pleasure to shut the doors on those late-comers and to hold them tight-closed despite a sound of protests, for no late-comers should be admitted till the congregation has risen to its feet again and started to sing. Then it is a pleasure to let them in and do the best one can for them in the matter of seats. One's benevolence is further gratified as the service proceeds, and one's boredom relieved, by being able to carry hymn-books to those in want. Always, too, there is the chance of a lady's fainting, or of some disorderly interruption, when one will have much that is interesting to occupy one's time. And lastly there is the collection.

Mr. Gallimore, in frock-coat, waistcoat-slip, spats, and polished boots, was just such a familiar, and, on the whole, popular figure to the congregation of St. Philip and St. James's.

But about this time, it may be recalled, a fashion of seceding either to the left and Nonconformity or to the right and Rome had no little vogue in the Anglican world. This and that well-known priest would publish his future adhesion to Nonconformity, and this and that layman, famous in literature or politics, would announce his imminent translation to Rome. Then what a spot-light



fell on the interesting convert ! Paragraphs, or even articles, were written about him in the journals ; his devoted service to the Church he so regretfully abandoned was rehearsed in the public ear (and, indeed, this is often the only way one can get one's service so rehearsed) ; the Church he was joining wrote extravagantly of him as " a new and valued asset " ; and as likely as not, the man himself analysed his spiritual condition in a twelve-and-sixpenny book. And almost immediately, one observed, he was advanced to the highest seats in his new kingdom.

Mr. Gallimore, since he was fifteen, had never read of a man's sudden entry into fame, by a wonderful invention, an heroic deed, a successful novel, or a secession to Rome, without feeling stirred to do something similar. He was stirred by such an idea now. He knew, of course, that *his* conversion would never reverberate like an arch-deacon's or a novelist's, but it would reverberate a little ; and this was all he could hope to do now. The secession of a sidesman of many years' standing—I had almost said, walking—would be in its little local way a major sensation. No literature would be produced on the subject, but there would doubtless be a regretful panegyric in the magazine of his late parish, and a welcoming essay in the periodical of whatever church or chapel he finally joined. No volume would come from his hand, giving a brilliant analysis of the long days of battle between the thrust of his conscience and the pull of his loyalty ; but doubtless he would write a moving and dignified letter to the Vicar.

But Mr. Gallimore was an honourable man, and wanted to take this serious step from sincere motives. He would not do it unless the germs of unrest were *truly* in his conscience. He must be sure that he was not leaving St. Philip and St. James's just to create a sensation, or just because his long service had been inadequately recognized, though this was a permanent sore and a permanent subject of conversation with Ruth. To go for such

reasons would be petty in the extreme. And *if* he went, which way would he go—to Rome or Dissent? It was *did* easy to decide which way his feelings, supposing they not become unrestful, would tend to push him. Rome was the more picturesque, but Dissent the more intellectual. And Rome bristled with all sorts of inconveniences and repressions; and really there did not seem much opportunity for the laity to exercise their talents and fill a worthy position. In a Dissenting Chapel, on the other hand, he would probably, in recognition of his forty years' Anglicanism, be at once made an Elder or a Deacon. And that would be a well-merited lesson to St. Philip and St. James's: in all humility one could but deplore the slowness of Anglicans to use what material they enjoyed. Here was he: five years had he been a prominent and regular communicant before they even suggested he should be a sidesman; and now he had been ten years a sidesman and never once had they offered him the churchwarden's wand, or even promoted him from his beat in the side-aisle to more responsible jurisdiction in the nave. It was not for his own sake that he deplored this slackness and *laissez faire*, but for the Church's. It would be good for the Church to take the knock of his defection.

In his mental picture of this *coup*, he always visualized, as a preliminary, an affecting scene between himself and his wife, in which he told her of the long travail through which his soul had passed before he had come to so momentous a decision, and in which she, like another Ruth, declared that where he went, she would go, his people should be her people, and his God her God. Then would come his dignified letter to the Vicar—"my dear wife, I rejoice to say, is with me in this step"—and the next Sunday their appearance together, not unremarked, at his new church or chapel.

I do not think these aspirations were above the surface of his mind, as perhaps I have represented them here;





they were underneath ; but they leapt above ground when at length a remarkable book gave to his intellect and conscience the desiderated unrest. An earnest friend had given him this book, " The Englishness of Dissent " ; and it had convinced him that, whatever might be the established religion *de jure* in England, Dissent was established *de facto*, for the simple reason that it was established in the essential character of all Englishmen. They were born to dissent. Their genius, as all history showed, was a genius for the disputing of authority. The freedom of the individual conscience, how sturdily they had fought for it against kings and favourites, popes and prelates ! For the English a Church was a matter of conscience, and therefore an English Church established by law was a contradiction in terms. To speak of a Free Church was to speak of a Church for Englishmen. They must be free who spoke the tongue that Shakespeare spake.

. . . . And not only their love of freedom but their spirit of adventure sang the same tune. Not for Englishmen the safe harbourage of guaranteed creeds, for them the fearless voyaging into the new uncharted seas of doubt—how vigorously Mr. Gallimore nodded at this argument !—for them the lonely toil up the peaks of the Higher Criticism.

Mr. Gallimore read it during the whole of a wet Saturday afternoon and evening ; and as he read, he told himself with gathering excitement, " I am being convinced." And when about nine o'clock he finished the last word, he thought a minute, closed the book, laid it on the table, and said with a nod, " I am convinced."

It was, he hoped, a wonderful moment of decision. Conviction had come to him. How it had opened his eyes, that book ! To think that he had long conceived as matter for shame his secret doubts of the Virgin Birth ! Why, there was no shame in them, but almost a grandeur ; it had been the restless stirring of an intellect that must be free, a spirit that could not be shackled or commanded.

He was too English not to have broken free, sooner or later.

Mr. Gallimore summoned his wife from the kitchen ; and when she came, he looked at Stephen and asked, with a pleasant feeling of importance, if he would mind leaving the room to his mother and himself, as they had something private to discuss together. Stephen obeyed with a shrug of resignation.

Mrs. Gallimore, recognizing that she would be delayed, wiped her fingers on her apron.

" I wish you wouldn't do that," he protested. " It's the action of a charwoman."

" I'm sorry, dear," smiled Mrs. Gallimore.

A sharp disappointment, this ; his beginning was spoiled ; he felt an exasperation with Ruth, for having jerked him into anger when he desired sentiment and sympathy.

" You never seem to understand that men hunger for their wives to be—what shall I say—stately. Of course I know that homely things have to be done, but a really wise woman would conceal them from her husband. I can't understand : women never seem to *think* ; they never seem to realize that man is not naturally a monogamous animal, and that therefore it is up to the wife, if she wants to help her husband in his struggle to be loyal to her, to do it by only appearing before him as attractive as possible—and in such a way that he feels no disappointment, but rather gratification. The world would be happier if they did, and there would be fewer stories of unhappiness. We have a vision of what our wives might be, you see ; perhaps we are unreasonable creatures, but there it is : we want to worship our wives, if we can—we must worship some woman—it is our nature—and so we create a vision of our wives as stately things—*grandes dames*, as the French put it——"

" Was this what you were going to talk to me about ? " asked Ruth.

" No, it was about religion."



## A MAJOR SENSATION

"Oh, well perhaps I had better run and turn down the gas under the saucepan. It may boil over."

"No, don't go. I have something of the greatest importance to talk about. It's really serious."

"Well, shall you be long? It's just on the boil."

"Oh, dammit, never mind," snapped he. "I'll leave it unsaid."

"No, don't do that, dear. What was it?"

"It was—it was this. I have long been far from happy in the Church of England; I feel I need more intellectual freedom; I have deepened, I think; and widened; and to-night I have finally decided that I shall leave her and attach myself to Dissent. I feel I shall be spiritually happier there—intellectually easier."

"Well . . . so long as you're happy, dear——"

"But confound it! this is a serious step. After forty odd years. . . . Can't you *see* it?"

"I shouldn't worry too much about its seriousness. A holiday is good for us all, occasionally. Excuse me, I really must go and turn off that gas. I'll be back in a minute."

"Oh, don't trouble, don't trouble!" he shouted after her; and hurt—deeply hurt, he walked towards the blinded window. "Intellectually isolated!" worried he. "Socially isolated, emotionally isolated, and now *spiritually* isolated!" Really he must tell Ruth how bitterly she could hurt him; these were extraordinarily good phrases, and she ought to hear them. "Spiritually isolated!" And, thus encouraged, still finer phrases came gushing from his wound: "I look around for a companion, and I learn that I must venture into my spiritual wilderness alone."

This was too good; he must go and say it to Ruth at once; she would be touched and consolatory, as she always was. Sadly he walked towards the kitchen: not the first man in history who has gone to his wife to comfort him for the failure his wife has been to him.

## CHAPTER II

### *What Happened to Stephen*

#### I

STEPHEN hurried along the pavements that lay between Leicester's and his lunch at the Shakespeare Head. He was alone. To-day, as for the last twenty days, he wanted to be alone. Life had just lit up again ; it was as bright as it had been five years before, in that brief period when Edith was the silent pole of his thoughts. Incredible that it should be five years since that rich rood of life ! Things had just gone on in the meantime ; as he had foreseen, nothing had happened to change the face of his life ; thanks to his reserve, he had made no coloured friendships with his fellows, and sought no transient flirtations with the girls ; going daily to the office, he had encountered no more interesting events than the terraced steps by which his weekly stipend had mounted from twelve shillings and sixpence to thirty-five shillings.

Or so Stephen thought. But more interesting things had happened to him, and he had not thought of them as interesting. Those hidden aspirations which could not develop into the swagger of a fine hero had continued to develop as the swagger of a city clerk ; and the seed of vanity which Miss Magnus had sown (though she meant well) had sprouted into clothes and ornamentation. Stephen was now something of a dandy, and, I fear, a trifle vulgar ; though in his justice let it be said that never, right up to the end, was his vanity at all commensurable with his quiet extraordinary good looks. His clothes had changed from a youth's ready-mades



to the bespoke suits of a cheap tailor ; and they and the other ornaments of his body had become conscious like nerve-ends. His gold tie-pin, representing the head of a fox (the nearest he got to hunting, for many years), was always sending the assertion of its presence to his brain ; and other sensitive terminals were his silver-gilt watch-chain, that stretched across the top-pockets of his vest, the silver swimming-medal that hung from one of its links, and the patent-leather toes of his boots.

And now life had lit up again, and he hurried to his lunch at the Shakespeare Head. It was not a steady light ; it was troubled by a sense of guilt and weakness. It was not radiant with dreams of some impossible leap to Edith's level, but rather tremulous with fears of a very possible fall to levels beneath his own. But in its own order, a tremulous light is as lovely as a steady radiance ; and Stephen was happy and excited in it. What did it not make of his luncheon hour ? Always this had been a happy hour, but hitherto an hour of restful slackening, and now an hour of quickened heart-beats and hot cheeks. Good heavens, Florrie ! there was nothing in your simple powers to work this transfiguration ; nothing but your beauty which was comparable to Stephen's own ; simply came the vexing goddess and hung a creative gift around your body, by means of which you were able to do all this with Stephen's lunch. It is an amazing fact—as other writers, I think, have written before.

His father had introduced him to the lunches at the Shakespeare Head about three weeks ago ; but now he came no more, for he had just been promoted to the managership of the Correspondence Department, and his salary was above £400 and his dignity above the Shakespeare Head. " Come, Stephen," he had said. " I have been thirty-five years in this office and only just discovered the Shakespeare Head. If you don't mind lunching in a public house, they give you the best lunch

you'll get around here for eighteen-pence. They give you enough, that's the great thing."

They set off together. They crossed the Broadway and turned up a side-street where the shops were small again. About a hundred yards up they reached a small public house, and pushed open the door marked "Saloon Bar." It was not a large saloon: against the left-hand wall were six luncheon-tables each laid for four people, and up the right-hand wall ran the counter which had come wheeling under a mahogany screen that secured the privacy of a little narrow confessional, called the Bottle and Jug Department. Behind the counter stood the landlord in shirt-sleeves, and Stephen always remembered how, as they entered, two clients for Guinness, with bowlers pushed back off their brows, had tossed down their coins with that faint braggartry which always goes with a hat on the back of one's head and an order for Guinness as distinct from an order for your cheap draught stout; and how the landlord, with magnificent automatic aplomb, had swept up the coins, clapped them into the cash register, slapped down the change, and wiped down the counter, lipping his cigarette the while.

"Morning, sir," said the landlord.

"Good morning," said Mr. Gallimore, quite eager to display to Stephen his familiarity with the place. Walking to the farthest of the six tables, he threw down his newspaper, with proprietary ease, on to a vacant chair. Most of the other tables were full.

"Morning, Bob," greeted a man, already seated at the table.

"Good morning, Ralph," acknowledged Mr. Gallimore, as he hung his hat and coat on a peg. "Haven't they caught you yet?"

"No. Still at large."

"Well, well; what's come to our police, I can't understand."

He tidied his hair in a picture of Queen Victoria, the



expanse of her black skirt providing the reflection. They sat down, he and Stephen, and a young girl, very fair and fresh (which, for the present, was all that Stephen observed), came to their side for orders.

"Good morning, Florrie," said Mr. Gallimore, pleasantly patronizing.

"Good morning, sir."

"Not married yet, bless my soul?"

"No, sir."

"Well, well; what's come to our lads I can't understand. Should have thought somebody'd have carried you off before this. Let's see what you've got to-day."

He took up the bill of fare, affixing pince-nez for its study.

"Now I want you to give us something extra special to-day, Florrie. Something quite extra. I've brought my boy with me. He's particular what he eats, is Stephen."

"Yes, sir."

Mr. Gallimore thought that he was doing splendidly. He had a vague feeling that in contrast with the silent Stephen, he was proving himself a personality—a man who was popular with the men of the world, and, when it came to a pretty waitress, had something of a way with him.

But at that moment the door swung open, and a little man with a thin, self-satisfied air, strolled up the saloon, his mien less that of a popular visitor than that of one who had bought the place.

"Morning, James."

"Morning, Stanley," came the reply.

"Morning, Peter."

"Morning, Stanley."

"Morning, Bennet dear."

"Morning, Mason dear."

"Morning, Guv'nor."

"Morning, sir."

This brought Mr. Stanley Mason to the Gallimores' table. He stopped abruptly, pushed back his felt hat, said, "Well, well, well," and replaced his hat. He opened his coat, and pushed both hands into his trousers pockets. "Well, I never! Here's old Gallimore at it again. Eatin', eatin'—always eatin'. . . . And Ralph! Lor' love us! All the *gourmets*—I learnt that word from a French polisher, gentlemen. . . . And oo's this? Not your boy, is it, Bob? No, that's never your boy?"

"Yes, it is," said Mr. Gallimore, a thought sulkily.

"Oh, no. You've made a mistake. That can't be your boy."

"Why not?"

"Well—I mean to say—look at him. Look at him. He's not bad looking. Not as people go, these days."

Florrie smiled; an incident which Mr. Stanley Mason at once remarked.

"Florrie, my love. . . . Did you see it, Gallimore—she gave me a smile. We're gettin' on, Florrie and I. Florrie, Mr. Gallimore's boy don't look like a Borstal case, does he? Not as you'd expect. Here, honey"—he took off his hat and handed it to her—"hold my horse while I dismount. Mind her mouth; she's tender." Removing his coat he took the hat again and hung both on a peg. Then, after tidying his hair in the royal skirt, he sat down at their table and looked behind him to see if there were any friends whom he had failed to greet. "Ah!" exclaimed he with delight, as he descried one. "Morning, Colonel. Damned cold on the parade ground this morning, what? Damned chilly. . . . And ah!" He waved his unfolding table-napkin at another. "Morning, Stoker."

Mr. Gallimore, whose lighter guns had been firing so merrily, was silenced by this heavy artillery. This Stanley Mason was an assertive little popinjay, thought he; the type that must always fill the centre of the stage. Little, thin men were so often like that; tall, stouter



men didn't need to shout their presence. And as a protest against such loudness he asked Florrie very quietly :

"What do you recommend to-day, Florrie?"

"There's lamb and boiled, chops and mashed, beef and greens," recounted Florrie.

"Are the chops good?"

Mr. Mason, who had now arranged his napkin, touched the girl's cheek.

"Anyone can see they're good. Delicate chops, those."

Florrie smiled, but took a step out of reach of his hand. Mr. Gallimore frowned.

"I'll have lamb and boiled potatoes, and cauliflower. You'd better have the same, Stephen."

"Beef for me," said Mr. Mason. "And remember the fat. I like a little fat, Florrie." He winked at Stephen. "We all like *a little fat Florrie*, don't we?"

"Yes, sir," answered Florrie. "And some potatoes and greens?"

"Yes, I suppose so. Bring us some of your spuds and seaweed. We can die but once. 'And how can man die better than facing fearful odds?' That's poetry, Florrie. I've been to a good school in my time; my mother paid for my education out of the housekeeping. And Florrie: half a pint. And bring these two gentlemen a half-pint. With me, see?" In satisfaction at this example of his bounty he sucked his teeth.

"Two lambs boiled and colly; one beef boiled and greens," rehearsed Florrie; and went to a lift just beyond the counter's end, and sent the same recital down the shaft. Then she waited at the lift, with her hand above her head on its shutter. It was a singularly graceful attitude, unconsciously assumed.

Mr. Mason was impressed by it.

"Florrie, don't stand like that!" he commanded. "You ruffle all our composes. We are but human, and as for Mr. Gallimore here—he's susceptible, he is."

The girl smiled, not displeased, and dropped her hand. Mr. Gallimore rustled with an annoyance that was not clear to him ; but Mr. Mason seemed only conscious of success.

"She looks like Love at the Shutter—Love shut out. Ah, well, why aren't some of us young again? The field is yours, young fly-by-night." This to Stephen, and Mr. Mason would probably have elaborated it, had not a new client entered the saloon, touched him on the shoulder, and said :

"Morning, Doris."

"Morning, sweetheart," instantly retorted Mr. Mason, before he knew who had greeted him. When he recognized the gentleman, he crumpled up his table-napkin, slammed it on the table, and pushing both hands in his pockets, exclaimed :

"Well, well, well."

"Bear up, bear up," pleaded the new-comer. "Wonderful what the system can stand."

"It's Benjy," declared Mr. Mason. "Benjy as I'm a sinner. I won't kiss you, Benjy, because I've got a cold ; but thank goodness there's now one other gentleman here beside myself."

"Yes, they are a crowd, aren't they?" agreed Benjy.

"A crowd? I should think so! I tell you, Benjy, I've come down in the world. Used to move in better circles than these. How goes it, Benjy?"

"Rotten."

"Rotten? Stuff! You're making your thousand a year if you're making a dollar. How d'ye mean, rotten?"

"I dunno. I've been feeling loopy all the morning."

"How d'ye mean, loopy?"

"I dunno."

"D'ye mean that if you saw your mother run over, you'd laugh?"

"Yes, that ; and worse than that. Can't explain. Just potty."



## WHAT HAPPENED TO STEPHEN

"I know! You mean you'll be eating your coffee with a knife."

"Yes, that's it. That's exactly it."

"Well, well, well," meditated Mr. Mason. "Florrie, give him a drink. Half a pint of the usual. With me, see?"

He sucked his teeth.

"Thanks, Stan, I shan't mind if I do. Dashed now if I shan't come round and see you at your office one of these mornings."

"Hell, no!" protested Mr. Mason; but on thinking over the offer, he conceded, "Well, do if you must."

And he glanced at Mr. Gallimore and Stephen for approval of his wit. Mr. Gallimore accorded him half a grin; but by his frown at Stephen and his deliberate gaze elsewhere, he intimated to the boy that if he had dropped into silence, it was because he did not deal in Mr. Mason's heavy facetiousness. The silence of the Gallimores lasted for the remainder of the meal, and Mr. Mason, Benjy and his friends were left in the centre of the stage.

## II

If Mr. Mason had not appeared that morning with such a salvo of introductory guns, and had not drawn attention to Florrie's smooth cheeks and the disturbing grace of her attitude, and if the landlord had not immediately followed up by telling her crossly, "Don't stand waiting there while the food's cooked. Here's a gent opposite wants attending to," it is possible that Stephen would hardly have noticed her. On such flying flecks do our destinies ride! But a quick admiration when Mr. Mason said, "The field is yours, young fly-by-night," and a pang of pity when the gross landlord rebuked her and made her blush, awoke him to a pleasant interest, and there leapt into his mind, quite unwilling, a picture of himself hungrily kissing Florrie. With a heating of the cheeks he sank further into

thoughts of this embrace, till he wondered what had happened to him. He was watching her and wondering all the meal. Was it that his love for Edith had been an innocent thing ; that he had never really felt this aspect of love before ? Certainly he had never hungered for an embrace as he was hungering now. This was quite different from his desire for Edith. Then he had fallen in love with a pair of childish eyes and wanted their owner to love him too ; now he was eager to gather a body into his arms.

Let us understand, better than Stephen, what was happening to him. Let us state a truth, without shame or recoil ; and may others solve the problem it contains. Had Stephen been less clean ; had he been less romantic in his thoughts of women, more experienced in what they could give him ; had some of the priestesses of civilization (as Lecky, the historian of morals, named them) ministered occasionally to his needs, he had never been hurled by the careless force of nature into this luminous mist of love for Florrie. But, as it was, her figure which, if short, was perfect of its kind ; her pale hair ; her straight-featured, not very intelligent, but quiet and oddly reverent face ; and her shapely arms, issuing from the rolled-up sleeves—all these potent seeds had a field in Stephen where the soil, never tilled or touched till now, was ripe for the strongest growths. He was soon intoxicated with his thoughts of this girl. His simple asceticism had turned, like a false friend, and unhorsed him. And if you argue him a fool, be sure that you have known the perfect restraint which to this ignorant, romantic youth was one with decency ; and have experienced the force of desire that is born in it. Be sure you argue from an equal purity.

But come : this is too serious by far. A headmaster's study seems to have shaped itself around us, with moral exhortation in the atmosphere, and a cane in the corner. Let us escape into the playgrounds again.



During the three weeks since that first sight of Florrie, Stephen had lunched daily at the Shakespeare Head. And though Florrie and he had not spoken, their eyes and understanding had established a bashful contact. She watched for his entry ; she reddened as he appeared.

To-day—possibly—he was going to take a decisive step. . . . Or should he not ? . . . His mind was yet unresolved as he hurried across the Broadway and up St. Martin's Street. Should he at a touch turn the thickening fetters into chains, or should he snap them ? Not for a minute did he doubt that if he made the touch, he must, in honour, think of the chains as unbreakable. He didn't want Florrie to flirt with him for a month or two, but to feel for him that complete, enduring love which one read of in the books ; and it was not in Stephen to think of making her do this and then leaving her. Only the villains acted like that. No, this was a crisis that he was approaching, as his steps, rapid like his mind, carried him towards the Shakespeare Head. The windows of the public-house were in sight, and he had closed on no decision.

“ Shall I, or shall I not ? After all, what better could I expect ? I'm only a clerk without prospects. I can expect no better.”

This was an argument that tried to sit heavily on the scales ; but he suspected, or half suspected, that in his dominating desire to have Florrie for his arms, he was pressing on every argument to give it more than its true weight.

“ Thirty-five shillings a week ! How could I expect a better wife ? I should be lucky if she would face it. . . .”

His thinking veered.

“ After all, wouldn't I rather be the one that gave his partner the worldly rise than the one who took it ? . . . Of course I should. It'd be a rise for Florrie. . . . And it's only to one placed as she is that *I* can give a rise.”

He pressed on this argument too, and the scales tilted. Lord ! here was the door, and he was still undecided. Should he give her the letter or not ?

For in his breast-pocket lay a letter :

MY DEAR MISS FLORRIE,—

I hope you will not consider this impertinent of me, but I feel we know each other, and I have been wondering whether we might not be friends. If you have plenty of friends and don't want me, please just say " No " before I go away this morning, but if you feel you would like to come out with me sometimes, please just say " Yes " and you will make me very happy.

Yours truly,

STEPHEN GALLIMORE.

Without a decision he pushed open the door. Yes, Florrie's eyes swung to the door, like the eyes of one who had watched each entry. She coloured and walked away ; and Stephen nearly decided. " Oh, I want her, I want her terribly. Who am I to be supercilious about a girl ? Thirty-five shillings a week ! Many with three pounds a week have probably flitted around her."

Always when he sat at his table, she came to him directly, though with averting eyes ; it was as if, by this little attention, she would indicate her favouritism. To-day she came straight to him, before he was seated—and he was nearer a decision than ever. He looked up at her face. As always her colour was high, while she stood waiting for his order. Oh yes, she would come to him if he gave her the letter !

" What have you nice to-day ? " Never had he been able to call her Florrie.

" There's pork and boiled ; roast beef and Yorkshire."

" Choose for me." It was the most daring thing that he had said.

" The roast beef and Yorkshire is very good."



## WHAT HAPPENED TO STEPHEN

"I'll have that, since you recommend it."

"Thank you, sir."

With the table napkin she dusted his place—did she do it more carefully for him than for any other? She went to the lift-shaft and called, "Roast and Yorkshire"—and beyond doubt her voice trembled as it uttered the one order of the day that was troubled by love—"Potatoes and greens."

Stephen had to accept her word that the beef was good, for he knew only that he was putting solids into his mouth; his brain, whirling with other thoughts, could register no news from his palate. For a minute his increasing desire to deliver the letter had been arrested by a glimpse of her spoiled hands; the next minute the same sight was working the opposite end. Should he be so caddish as to let that hinder him? They would be soiled enough in a home where he could give her no servant—and the picture of that home, with Florrie moving through it as a wife, nearly sent his hand into his breast-pocket. Fate seemed anxious for him to make his move; it had arranged that no one else was at his table.

"Will you take any sweets, sir?"

"What have you got?"

"Apple tart and custard, and pears and shape."

"Choose for me again."

"I prefer the pears and shape."

"Then I'm sure I shall."

She moved away.

"Florrie!"

He had done it! He could not back out now.

"Yes, sir?"

"I've—I've a letter here I want you to read—it's for you." He felt the blood mounting over head and hair, and saw that Florrie was in a like predicament. "Would you—would you read it now? . . . I mean, there's an answer."

She took it with insecure fingers.

"Thank you, sir."

Walking quickly to the lift-shaft, she called "Pears and shape," but never in so uncaptured a voice. Her hand went up to the shutter in an automatic action, and Stephen could see how the arm was quivering. And look : because the order was taking time to materialize down below, she was abandoning the shutter and running out of the saloon, certainly to tear open the letter and learn its contents. "The darling ! She's happy and excited ! Oh, I'm glad I did it." Here she was, returning, and how high her colour ! With her back turned she waited at the lift. Many other orders came up the shaft, and she served every one before him ; she was avoiding the moment of coming to his table. Even she took orders from other men, and called them in a trembling voice, while his pears and shape waited on a sideboard.

At last she brought it to him ; he did not know what to say ; but as she moved away, after a diffident delay, he looked up and asked :

"Well, would you like to ?"

"Yes, sir ; thank you very much."

And Stephen, his heart throbbing with excitement, his brain with plans, pressed his hand over hers as it touched the table beside him.



## CHAPTER III

### *The Bowdens*

#### I

THE first weeks of Stephen's dalliance with Florrie were of a happiness too novel for doubts to find an entry. Each day at lunch to rest his hand on hers as a sign that she was his ; each evening to find her waiting for him in Two Shilling Lane ; each evening to travel with her as far as Hammersmith ; each Saturday to wait for her in St. Martin's Street, till she issued from the Shakespeare Head at three o'clock, and then to go off with her to Kensington Gardens, where the spring was peeping—and all the while to conceal these happenings from Waldron Avenue—how spend days more guiltily delightful ?

The pricks of doubt knocked through when the excitement and novelty slowed down ; but they were not very troublesome doubts. To silence them there surged up all his wonder at possessing so pretty a thing ; at being allowed, as by right, to touch and hold her ; at the evidences that her love was growing to a wild adoration. To be adored, to be the one and only thought in the mind of a beautiful little fellow-creature—was not this to attain the top of happiness ? And oh, it was plain that Florrie worshipped him. She had no art to conceal the completeness of her slavery. She revealed it by her stares at his features ; by the tightness of her embrace, a hold almost frightened ; and by letters, if she missed sight of him for a single day : “ Every moment I know you makes me love you more and more. I have no desire in life apart from you. I am yours for ever and ever.”

To contest the ground with such an experience as this, when it was come to Stephen for the first time, what chance had the little doubts? Was it a big thing that her vocabulary rang faintly different from the vocabulary at home; that she would repeat a hundred times in the course of some torrential report of her employer's injustice, "I said . . . I said to him . . . I said . . . But I said . . ." that she should mention casually, as if it were a natural thing for her class, her education in an elementary school; that she should speak without apology of her father's job in a brewer's yard?

"Good lord, if I love her, what do these things matter?" He remembered Miss Magnus. "She has other capital than wealth and education. Look at her beauty. I ought to think myself lucky that she should offer such capital to me." And all his romantic ideas came charging up like cavalry to his relief. "As Miss Magnus said, Love ought to crash through all the little impediments. I expected Edith to give herself to me, far below her as I was; and shall I now be too high and mighty for Florrie?"

Not till the day he visited her home did the doubts gather together, attack in mass, and seriously damage his stockade. She had begged hard for permission to tell her parents all about him, and he had consented. That she should be bewildered by her prize touched his heart and at the same time set his mind doubting again. And now, one Saturday afternoon, she was taking him back to tea with her. "I want them to see you. Oh, I want them to see you." He smiled tolerantly.

The first shock was to find that the Bowdens lived over a shop, and such a small shop too—a little oil and hardware place in the Fulham Road. All that was Waldron Avenue in him recoiled at the sight, for Waldron Avenue is the last ditch of the class that calls itself residential. "Well, they're damned snobs," he snorted to himself, and went laughingly up the narrow stairs.



'We have the first floor,' said Florrie, not without pride ; and Stephen followed her along the passage to the brightness of the front room.

Now at Waldron Avenue there was a little drawing-room with its piano and its bric-à-brac, as well as a little dining-room with all its mahogany ; but this room was dining-room and drawing-room both : a dining-room if you looked at its table in the centre with the plush-seated chairs around it, and a drawing-room if you looked at the piano pushed flush with the mantelpiece, and the two easy chairs that turned towards the fender. The room was clearly on parade for his visit, having probably been dressed for company as soon as the dinner-things were cleared away. The tea-things were now spread over the table for "company tea" ; a glass dish of lettuce and a vase of celery flanking the plum cake and the jam, and a clean napkin lying on the visitor's plate.

Mrs. Bowden rose from her chair, where she had evidently been sitting in review order for some time. She was a thin, slender, tired little woman, who reminded him at once of his mother, though her eyes were less humorous, less alight.

"This is Mr. Gallimore, mamma," said Florrie.

"Pleased to meet you, I'm sure," said Mrs. Bowden, giving him her hand. "Mr. Bowden'll be in in a minute, and I'm sure he'll be delighted to meet you too."

"Not at all," Stephen felt it necessary to mutter ; and they all sat down round the fireplace.

"We appreciate your kindness to Florrie so," ventured Mrs. Bowden.

"Oh no," stuttered Stephen, with an appropriate smile, "it is she who is kind to me."

"Not at all," protested her mother, and added somewhat inconsequently, "Florrie's a good little girl."

During this interchange Florrie sat and stared at her prize.

"I'm sure I wish we didn't have to send her to work

in that hotel. It's not what I like for her at all." The excellent woman was going to play her daughter's hand to the best possible purpose. "But what with Mr. Bowden's ill-health, and one thing and another, his stipend is not as large as it ought to be, and—er——"

"Yes, of course." Stephen thought the best way to come to her rescue was to step into the same boat with her—a craft which we may call "The Distressed Gentleperson"—and bring all his family with him. "We've found it much the same. Not that father's ever had ill-health, but—there are three of us—and his stipend does not go very far."

"Exactly. It's one comfort that many of the best people are having to live in quite a small way, nowadays."

Deuce take it, did she really imagine his people lived in quite such a small way as this?

"And what does your father do, Mr. Gallimore?"

"He is the manager of our office at Leicester's."

"Yes, Mr. Bowden should have been manager of his department if his health had allowed him."

Manager indeed! Did she really think there was any parallel between the manager of forty clerks at a firm like Leicester's and the shirt-sleeved foreman of some brewer's yard? For a little he was disposed to throw out hints of his father's greatness, but he refrained, his pity beginning to play.

"Ah, here's Mr. Bowden."

Stephen had heard some one clearing his throat and climbing the stairs. He wondered what Florrie's father would be like. Remembering the allusion to some ill-health that had impeded his rise to the top of his profession, Stephen conceived him, for a second, as a little, narrow-chested man, with Florrie's hair but none of her radiant health. His heavy step, however, and his cheery humming, designed apparently to give an effectiveness to his entry, hardly strengthened this picture. The next second he entered, and Stephen saw a short, fat man, whose



ill-health, if it existed, must have been of the kind that expressed itself, not in pallor, but in florid cheeks and a reticulation of harmoniously coloured veins that extended, like rivers in a map, round about the crevices and up the slopes of his nose. From the veined complexion, and the largeness of his paunch, and a husky richness in his voice that had frequently to be cleared out of the way of his words, Stephen suspected that Mr. Bowden supported, as far as his means allowed, the interests of the brewery.

"Hallo, sir! Hallo! hallo!" he greeted Stephen; who overheard himself thinking, "The plague! He's one of these humorists."

"Hallo, sir! Pleased to meet you, I'm sure. Sorry I wasn't here to meet you when you come, but a friend asked me to step round and wet a small transaction. Not a suggestion to be trifled with, eh? Well, I'm sure I'm delighted to see you. Good of you to come along and see how the poor live. And now, Mollie, hustle up with that there tea. Florrie, my beauty, kiss your father. There, is she a beauty, sir, or is she not? Wouldn't you be proud if you'd made a girl like that? Made her out of Four-Ale, too, chiefly."

Florrie kissed him while he squeezed her, and then pushed him away by his waistcoat. "Don't, Dad."

"'Ere!" he protested. "You rumpled my waistcoat." He pulled it down over his protuberant paunch, and did up its bottom button. "And I'm very particular how my waistcoat's treated. It's a very important part of me; very important." To emphasize the importance he beat on both sides of the protuberance with the flat of his hands. "It's took me fifty years to build up this little corporation and you wouldn't believe how many gallons of Four-Ale. And it needs some upkeep now, I can tell you, if I'm to keep it up to scratch. . . . What's the gentleman's name, Florrie?"

"Mr. Gallimore."

"Mr. Galli-nonsense. Don't tell me you call him Mr. Gallimore. Lor, Molly—old girl, we didn't call ourselves Mr. Bowden, did we? No, never let on—some of the things you and I called one another! I'd never have believed, sir, she'd have come out so strong. Stephen, your name is, I remember. Snakes, I ought to have remembered it—I've heard it often enough from that there girl. We don't hear much else these days, do we, Moll? Aren't you going to brew the tea? Look slippy about it, for the luv' o' Mike. Well, Stephen, delighted to welcome you to our mahogany, as the saying goes. Have a bit of lettus, while you're waiting."

Stephen declined: he was disturbed because his thought had just been, "Hang it! how dare he call me Stephen?" So Mr. Bowden, to kill time, pilfered three leaves of lettuce and pushed them all together and heads first, into his mouth, his right hand following them as his teeth drew them out of this world, and his left hand selecting some worthy successors. "Green beat for *be*, I alwer-say," said he, sending the words down his nose since they couldn't pass the crowding lettuce. "Gree' beat for *be*, I'm a rabbit for it." The second relay followed the first. "It's goo' for the blood. 'Elps to cow'teract the beer, I dare say. There's lau'di'dub in this 'ere heart, and it puts the quietus on anything that's at all uppish dow' here.—What, what?" And he slapped a tattoo on his protuberance. "There! all his peace and prosperity down there, now, sir. Peace with Honour, as Dizzy used to say."

Stephen still answered nothing; but he had noticed that Florrie's eye was upon him, and that she had flushed. And at once, love giving him a sympathy, he guessed her thoughts: she was ashamed of her father, and had not foreseen that she would be; for the first time she was estimating him, not with her own judgment, but with the judgment of a youthful visitor from a higher world. Oh, if that was what was happening in Florrie's little head,



how she must be suffering ! Instantly Stephen fought to defend her from her pains.

" I think it's awfully kind of you to come in at all, just because I was coming——" he began, fumbling for an appreciation.

" Not a bit of it—*nert* a bit of it, Stephen. Don't you kid yerself I come back just to do the polite. I wanted to see what you were like. My girl thinks all the world of you. There never was such a person before or since, you'd think, to hear her talk ; whereas you and I know a thing or two more than that, you bet. Ah well, love's young dream, as the saying goes. We were young once too, weren't we, Molly "—for Mrs. Bowden had entered with the teapot—" I expect you thought much the same about me—though I had my doubts about you from the beginning, old girl " ; and here he smacked, not his waistcoat, but his wife's skirt behind. Then he rubbed his hands together. " Tea, ladies and gents, pull up your chairs. For what we are about to receive may the Lord make us truly thankful. It's one of my religious days. It's the beer that fellow gave me, I suppose ; but it'll wear off. Wonderful how it'll have worn off, just about church time to-morrow mornin'. That there girl goes to church, sir, as reg'lar as clockwork, and her parson came and confirmed her and her ma, and Lord knows what all. She's reg'lar top-o'-the-tree in religion, and her curate, the Reverend Paget, thinks all the world of her. . . . Yes, put the turtle doves side by side, so they can squeeze each other under the table. When I was treating the missus to tea, in our courting days, I didn't enjoy what was on top of the table half as much as what was underneath it. And, bet your life, it was the same with the missus—least, she never ate much, which was a savin'."

" Tom *will* have his joke," explained Mrs. Bowden. " You mustn't mind him. Anyone would think he was twelve years old."

" *Werl*, I believe in keeping your pecker up, as the

saying goes. If you can't spot the Durby winner, you can make your thruppence at shove-ha'penny. And if you can't get hold of any Fuller, Smith, and Turner, you can drink Mrs. Bowden's tea"; which he illustrated by a long draught from his cup, and a happy sigh. The sigh unfortunately terminated in a small hiccough, on which he commented, without ill-feeling, "It's a bit soon after that beer, I suppose."

"Tom dear!" protested his wife, covering the incident with a laugh.

"They don't mix," explained Mr. Bowden further. "Not always. They're like me and the missus sometimes. Beer's beer, and tea's tea; and men are men, and women are women, and the difference between 'em's just about the same. Have you ever thought of that, sir? It's only just struck me. Men get a bit 'up,' sometimes, and frothy, like the beer, but they're good sound stuff at the bottom; whereas the women are like their tea—they invigorate you for a little, but get on your nerves in the end. And the tanning that's in them! Ha, ha, ha! Lord, it's one of my witty days, unmistakably. . . . But they have their place, sir, they have their place, the beer and the tea, and the men and the women—so long as you don't mix 'em. They shouldn't be mixed; that's marriage, that is, and a mighty poor brew; as you'll find out, sir, in time. Not that Florrie's like that—she's more of the milk-and-water sort; hurt nobody's nerves; maybe she'd mix quite well with a mild ale. Are you mild, sir?"

"I hope not," grinned Stephen, who was feeling, if not mild, certainly flat.

"Well, it remains to be seen how you mix with her, if that's really your game."

"It's early to discuss such a subject yet," said Mrs. Bowden. "Mr. Bowden's always premature, Mr. Gallimore; he's joking half the time."

"I guessed that," said Stephen.



## II

After tea he took her, as he had promised, to the Hammersmith Empire, in the King's Road. Walking by his side, she was silent, and he knew that her mental unrest could win no quiet till it had expelled in utterance the troubling thoughts. He was silent, too ; for an evil mood was triumphing in him : he felt that she ought to realize the superiority of his circumstances to hers ; and, though he would not admit it, he was glorying in his complete mastery of her and his power, by frowns of displeasure, to keep her in pain. And, all the while, she was holding his arm, sometimes as the pain throbbed worse, pressing it hard. She was miserable, and he was distinctly happy.

"You don't like Dad ?" she hazarded at last.

"Well. . . . Oh yes, why not ?"

"No. I know you don't. He's not your sort."

"I never supposed he was."

Stephen wondered how he could have said so brutal a thing ; wondered also that it was not unpleasurable to hurt her thus.

She dropped into silence, nothing coming from her except the spasmodic pressure of her hand upon his arm. He could have wept in pity for her.

"I like your mother very much," he offered contritely.

"I'm glad," whispered Florrie.

"And, after all," suggested he, hardly aware of what he was about to say, for not yet had they made mention of marriage, "it's nothing unusual for a man to prefer his wife to his wife's relations."

"His *wife* !" murmured Florrie.

To a young man, eager for love, it is a magic word, swelling his heart and touching his throat. What a picture it conjures up of a pretty creature, filling a home with her presence ! Flooding with desire, Stephen un-

linked his arm and put it around her shoulder. "Yes. Why not?"

She was speechless. She could only, with the arm about his waist, hold him tighter.

A dangerous thing, this Gallimore imagination. A few seconds ago the power of love had seemed to be out, and its memory to have taken a tinge of the ridiculous; now, at the touch of a beautiful word, Stephen's imagination had breathed on the chilling embers and raised them to flame again. Our destinies sit on the flecks as they fly. Before we have done with Stephen we shall learn how, in graver days, his destiny came riding towards him on the wings of a speckled mosquito.

A hundred paces and more in silence; sometimes they separated for the convenience of other pedestrians. Then Florrie asked, and it was clear she had been trying to say it for a long time:

"You didn't mean what you said just now?"

"Oh yes. Why not?"

"But I'm not good enough for you," she confessed, being without cunning or pride. "What is the good of pretending anything else? We're common, really."

"You are the girl I love," he answered grandiloquently. "Besides, I don't know that I am anything very much. I haven't a penny to jingle on a tombstone."

"Oh, what does that matter?" breathed Florrie.

So it was accomplished; and throughout the performance in the theatre, they held each other's hands, as if each were holding a prize just won.

### III

Stephen was now accepted by the Bowdens as Florrie's probable fiancé; and he determined to be, and was, I think, inordinately happy in his position. Florrie's rapturous, servile abandonment was a spring of incredible joy. But still he told no word to Waldron Avenue, though his father chaffed him, "Who is it, Stephen?"



Who is it you spend all your hours with ? ” drawing, in response, nothing but a grin.

It became an established custom that once a week he should go back to supper in the Fulham Road. Florrie would name the day for his coming, and it was always, he noticed, a day when Mr. Bowden was away ; Stephen saw very little of Mr. Bowden. “ We haven’t much room,” Florrie’s mother would say, “ and you youngsters don’t want us all on top of you. It is best for you to come when Mr. Bowden is out.” During supper time nine-tenths of the lady’s talk was directed, in her daughter’s interest, to proving an equality, if not a superiority, to anyone who might seek her hand. She made frequent allusion to a certain Sir Claude Bowden, who, let it be admitted, brought no small comfort to Stephen. After the meal she would make an excuse, judicious in the first week, and frank later, for leaving them alone. Whereupon they took to the horsehair sofa and lay in each other’s arms.

One evening Stephen, rising for a space out of this happy trance in Florrie’s arms, heard sounds that suggested a cheerful, if somewhat rich, return of Mr. Bowden. He suspected that Mr. Bowden was flowing back to his home, much as a river flows ; that is to say, he was arriving at the door in the Fulham Road, not by any conscious volition, but by some law of spiritual gravitation. The hasty movements of Mrs. Bowden in the passage hinted that she had hurried out to divert this flow into the kitchen, where she would be able to dam it up. Apparently she succeeded, for which Stephen was glad : he had feared in an acute moment that the final reservoir into which the flowing Mr. Bowden must settle would be the actual sofa on which Florrie and he were lying. The kitchen was on the other side of the thick wall, and he could just hear the murmur of the Bowdens’ voices. He strained his ears : was it only humming with which Mr. Bowden was interspersing his talk, or did he have

his moments of song? Well . . . he addressed his lips to Florrie's; what more could anyone want than this?

He never allowed his suspicions to reach Florrie till the disastrous day when he brought her home ill. He had found her waiting for him in Two Shilling Lane with the news that she had been feeling unwell all the day, and the landlord had told her to go home but she had held on, determined to be in her usual waiting place at six o'clock. He saw that she was flushed and shivering, and felt the heat of her hand.

Then did he hail a four-wheeler, rejoicing in so grand a gesture, and buy her a first-class ticket at Sloane Square Station, and put her in a corner seat, and sit beside her, ready to combat any—he was not clear what he was ready to combat, but he felt very fine. How sweet it was thus to care for her as a parent for a child, to feel her yielding herself entirely to his charge, to stroke her hot hand in the train, to guide her through crowds, and to order a second four-wheeler at Hammersmith Station and drive her to her door! All the way he was telling himself that this child resting against his bigger body was what he loved best in the world. How exquisite it would be to have her always in his home to care for!

At the door of the oil shop she made as if she would bid him good-bye, but he persisted in taking her upstairs. Mrs. Bowden, who had seen the cab and deduced from anything so unusual that her daughter must have been run over at least, rushed out at them from the front room. Stephen explained the occasion volubly, and they all passed back into the sitting-room and put Florrie on the sofa, propping her with cushions.

In the excitement they had left the room door ajar, and soon Mr. Bowden's voice came through from the kitchen. Something in the way this voice broke its previous silence suggested he had been listening, with breath suspended, to the superbly interesting movements outside.



"Sue-Stephen?" So it sounded; and again, more deliberately, "Iss-sue Stephen? Stephen, merlad, goo' boy; shust in time for supper."

Mrs. Bowden turned and said (for they were all disorganized), "Oh, drat the man!" and hurrying into the kitchen, commanded audibly, "Be quiet, Tom. *Will* you be quiet?" Coming back, she shut both the kitchen and the dining-room door.

Stephen pretended to have noticed nothing, and kissed a good-bye on Florrie's brow, and gave a hand to her mother. But even as she took it and thanked him for his kindness, there was the noise of the kitchen door, which opened outwards, bursting open and hitting the passage wall with a crash, as Mr. Bowden, deprived of its support, pitched past it across the landing and saved himself on the bannisters. A loud oath was so immediate in its following that you would have said that crash and oath were one.

Mrs. Bowden stood at a loss, and Florrie cast up her eyes at Stephen. The dining-room door, after being fumbled with, came open at a rush, and Mr. Bowden arrived with it, attached to its handle and following the arc of its travel; till, annoyed at being swung back on his tracks like this, he left it at a tangent and seized the corner of the table as a less retiring support. He was in shirt and trousers, his braces festooned over either hip.

"Damn," he offered, gratuitously.

Finding that the table did not describe an arc like the door, or at any rate not such a one as you could not control by an effort of the brain, he straightened himself and looked at the group round the sofa.

"Woz-all-zis? Woz-all-zis about? Bloomin' secrecy. I hate secrecy. 'S'underhand, all this talking behind close doors. Woz Fanny lying down for? Not Fanny—Florrie. Forget me own name next. Woz Fanny lying on the sofa for. Stephen, have you dunner-any harm? Dunner-any harm?"

"What do you mean, sir?" demanded Stephen, very indignant and not a little happy in his indignation.

"Dunner-any *harm*? *Harm*, see? Woz-should-I-mean? I don't trust you young men—not an inch farther than I can see you. Why should I? I been a young man meself, and had me way with the girls. If you dunner-any harm, own up as man to man—like a gentleman. You wo' regret it. I shall meet you—I tell you I shall meet you as sush. 'Tisn't as though I wasn't expecting summing like this. I told the missus the other day summing'd happen sooner or later. Especially when they're as good-looking as that, I said, and obviously the gen'l'man. You can't trust 'em, I said. Our Fanny's pretty girl. Fanny be damned! Florrie, I mean."

Stephen was glad that the heat must be suffusing his face. He was, in plain truth, enormously pleased at the insult and the dignity with which he would meet it and the fine advantage to which Florrie would now see him.

"Mrs. Bowden; perhaps I had better be going. This is an experience through which I have not been before."

"Oh, Stephen," pleaded Florrie.

He went to her.

"It's all right, Florrie dear; I understand. But I can't stay in the house of a man who has expressed such an opinion of me. I can never cross his threshold again."

Florrie dropped her head on the sofa and burst into sobs; and Stephen felt a man.

"Who's a low opinion avenny-one?" demanded Mr. Bowden. "Who said a low opinion? I've the highest opinion of you, Stephen. I don't mind you having a lark now and then s'long as it's not with my Florrie. She's my dor'er, after all; and I'm proud of her; you must allow for that. There's not many can show a dor'er like my Florrie. She's a beauty, and she's religious too. It's different when it comes to a dor'er. If you say there's nothing wrong, I trust you, merboy."



## THE BOWDENS

"Good night, Mrs. Bowden," said Stephen.

"Good night, Stephen."

"Good-bye, Florrie, my dear. Get better quickly."

"There, Tom, I hope you're satisfied," said Mrs. Bowden, standing as erect and stable as the figure of Doom.

"Satisfied? I done nothing wrong. Iss wrong to watch over a dor'er's interest? I'm her father, aren't I, and one that loves her berrer than me own heart's blood. I'm only careful—thaz-all. If the boy satisfies me that it's all so-kay, I ask no more. It's all so-kay, issn't it, Stephen? All so-kay with Florrie, issn't it, merboy? As man to man?"

Stephen passed him as if he were not in the room and went out at the door.

"Good-ni'," called Mr. Bowden, after the retiring boy. "Good ni', Stephen. Don't take too seriously wot I said. Meant no harm if you say it's all ri'."

Self-reproachfully, he staggered into the passage, and supported himself on the bannister. Stephen was now nearly at the foot of the stairs.

"I'm only s'picious where Florrie's concerned, because she's all I got—see, merboy? Mustn't take offence, Stephen. If you say it's all ri', it's all ri'. O' course."

Stephen was now crossing the passage to the hall door.

"Good ni'," called the contrite Mr. Bowden, over the bannisters. "Mustn't let an o' father's mistake injure his dor'er's chances. She's cryin', Stephen. 'S'my mistake, all of it. Look here, I'll admit I'm drunk, rather than you should take offence. Can't say fairer than that, can I? . . . *Werl!*" This exclamation of amazement was as Stephen opened the hall door and slammed it behind him, without an answer or a backward look.

## IV

Stephen walked to his omnibus in the friendly company of a resolution. As he sat in the vehicle, the resolution

sat with him and nestled into favour. Down the rope afforded by Mr. Bowden's intolerable insult he would break prison. Escape invited ; and yes, it would be better to take it.

For the first time he dug up the roots of his love and examined them. There was in him (as we have seen), besides his romantic illusions, the germs of clearer sight, the which, I suspect, he drew from his mother ; and his life-story was, in the main, a conflict between the soft, rosy glamour of his mental fictions and the hard light of day ; with a very complete victory for one of them, in the last hours. To-night he was seeing his love with naked eyes. Was it not all a golden mist rising from the physical desire to hold Florrie in his arms ? If he had led a fast life like other fellows, would this craving, this curiosity, have so drugged his reason ? " I am being punished and played the fool with, for having led a clean life—that's what it is, and it's not fair. There's not much fairness about Nature. She doesn't care twopence about our ideals, so long as she forces us to do her will. Well, I am not going to be forced. I can rise out of this."

He began to compose his letter to Florrie—a rather pompous letter such as only twenty-two, or those who remain twenty-two, can write : " Dearest, I feel sure you must see how impossible it will be for me to establish a filial relationship with one who has so grievously suspected me. I can only bid you good-bye and tender my eternal gratitude for all you have meant to me. You will have an enduring place in my memory. . . ."

He devoted the evening to drafting and re-drafting this composition ; and though he imagined that the evening was heavy with the tragedy of a love, actually it was not empty of the artist's delight in creation. And his finished product, as he read it, seemed a flawless piece of work.

In bed he decided that he would not send the letter for a few days. It would be a shame to hurt her while she was ill. But he would stay away from her home,



and omit to write ; that would prepare her for the blow, would it not ? “ I am free ! I am free ! ” repeated he, as he fell asleep.

But the clear light of day goes out in sleep ; and the body dictates to the brain what it shall think and dream. Let me put it in a parable. Stephen was a commonwealth that night in the throes of a hotly contested election. His mind, like a falling government, was proclaiming that it had liberated the state ; and his heart, and his whole body, like a blind, unintelligent plebs, was denouncing and refusing the liberation. The plebs rise to their triumph in sleep, for what is sleep but a *coup* that disables the government’s police ? To-night the commonalty are rioting in Stephen. His dreams are of Florrie, and Florrie, and Florrie again. He sees her standing by the lift-shaft in her Saloon Bar, with her hand on the shutter above her, and her head drooping lower and lower as she weeps. “ Florrie . . . darling . . . *don’t*.” But her head droops and her shoulders are round. “ She looks like Love Shut Out ” ; it is Mr. Stanley Mason speaking. Now Stephen is by her side. “ Florrie, you mustn’t suffer like that. Come, my dear. . . ” He is putting an arm about her shoulder, and the touch of her has stirred him so powerfully that, willy-nilly, he is gathering her close and turning up her chin that he may send his comfort into her eyes. With her face upturned and her eyes looking at him, what can he do but kiss her ? And that kiss runs through his veins, like a thousand messengers sounding the news that the old government is dead. Down all Liberation, and down Expediency ! We are for Florrie, though the country fall !

It was a hard task, and a heavy, to replace good government, when the daylight came again.

Once or twice during the next week he sent cards of inquiry to Mrs. Bowden, and received her information that the feverishness was over and it was now only a question of convalescence, and Florrie sent her love.

## THE OLD TREE BLOSSOMED

On the Saturday, five days after the seizure, he saw, on returning home, a letter in Florrie's handwriting. It had bulk enough to stimulate his curiosity, and picking it up, he ran with it to his bedroom. A shadow of fear fell across him as he sat on his bed and broke the envelope. Five violet sheets of a cheap writing-block had been impressed into the service of Florrie's trouble—how typical of her craftless unreserve!

MY DEAREST STEPHEN,—

I don't know how I am going to write this letter, but I feel I must if only to prove to you that I love you more than myself. I see now that I have done wrong in trying to hide from you that Daddy often comes home the worse for drink and that really we are dreadfully poor and in debt. I see that you can gain nothing by marrying me and that I ought, if I love you more than myself, as I do, to write and tell you that you must not consider yourself bound to me by what you said before you knew all. Of course you must not. I am not really good enough for you and I have always known it. So if you decide, and I am sure you will, that you must not marry me, I want to say I shall understand and fully sympathize. I don't pretend that it won't nearly kill me at first, but I am quite—*quite* sure that I would rather go through with it than feel I had cheated you in any way or put my happiness before yours. I don't think there is anything more to write, except that if you *did* feel you could marry me, I promise you I will make you such a wife as no one ever had before. I will live only for you because I love you better than my own soul. But I don't think you will and I am prepared for the worst. Oh, Stephen, please write to me at once, don't keep me waiting. I would rather know quickly.

Yours, no matter what happens, always yours,

FLORRIE.



Ah, Florrie's ingenuous sincerities worked more for her than the strategies of wiser women. The lump had been rising in Stephen's throat as he read, and before he came to the last word, he was possessed by pity. "This day!" he exclaimed dramatically, coming smartly to his feet. This day, this moment, while the resolve was strong in him, he would go and bind himself to Florrie with chains that could never, in honour, be broken. He had made her love him like this, and should he run from her in her pain? "Don't keep me waiting!" Poor darling, there was anguish there, and when all was said and done, he had inflicted it. That was enough. He ran out of 33 Waldron Avenue and leapt on to an omnibus. Perhaps, in the back of his mind, was the thought that, thirty generations before, there had run out of his castle and leapt on to his charger Stephen surnamed Gaillard Mort, riding to a rescue, at the head of his father's chivalry. All the way he was telling himself that he was riding to a rescue. A new aspect of the rescue had come to him suddenly, and he was aglow with it. To marry Florrie would be to take her from a drunken father and a threatened home. Why hadn't he seen this before? They had nothing to marry on, but didn't that make it better? To marry money and ease were the deed of a carpet knight, not of one who preferred the battle where the press was strongest. The omnibus charged to Hammersmith.

Here he left it, and driven by a new idea, walked into a shop. When he came out there was a tiny parcel in his pocket.

At the oil shop he found the side-door on the latch and hurried up the stairs. He peeped through the door of the dining-room and saw, as he expected, Florrie resting upon the sofa. He could see her ankles crossed, and because she was only in a short dressing-gown, her shapely calves. She was alone; and this was evidence, surely, that Fate designed he should do his purpose.

## THE OLD TREE BLOSSOMED

“ Stephen ! ”

A few quick steps, and he was at her side, sitting on the sofa's edge. His left hand took hers, while his right hand fumbled in his pocket.

“ Florrie, how dare you write such a letter to me ! Did you really think I should leave you like that ? For punishment give me this finger. Come along now ; don't be insubordinate.”

She gave it to him, and he slipped over it a nine-carat gold ring with a single garnet.

“ It's all I could afford for the present, but——”

“ *Stephen ! . . .* Oh, I'm sure I'm dreaming. . . .”  
The rest was lost in their sealing kiss.



## CHAPTER IV

### *Essays in Chivalry*

#### I

STEPHEN returned home in a state of considerable excitement and pleasure. Now—this evening—he would announce his engagement to his family, and the resultant scene should lend itself to some effective attitudes. “My dear father, it is useless to argue,” so the phrases shaped themselves. “My mind is made up. You will never induce me to go back upon my word.”

During supper he was silent. A table littered with the discards of supper, the fragments of bread and the cold potatoes, was no stage for the coming interplay. For such an action the room should be cleared. So it was when Mrs. Gallimore had gone with her crockery into the kitchen and Mr. Gallimore with his novel into the arm-chair, that Stephen, after rehearsing his part for the last time behind the day’s newspaper, began :

“Father, can I speak to you a minute?”

“Yes . . . what’s up?”

The “what’s up” seemed an unworthy door through which to enter upon the dignities of the scene, but none other offered, and Stephen passed in.

“I contrived to get engaged to-day. I thought you’d like to know.”

“Engaged? Engaged to what?”

“To a girl, of course.”

“Engaged to a girl! Why on earth haven’t you told me before?”

“Because it didn’t happen before. It only came to a head to-day.”

## THE OLD TREE BLOSSOMED

"Who is she? Do I know her?"

"You have seen her."

"Where?"

"At the Shakespeare Head."

"No girls ever lunched there in my time."

Though he had meant to keep his eyes on his father's all the time, Stephen could not hold them now from turning away.

"No, but one waited there."

"What, that little serving girl. Not *her*! You are not engaged to her!"

"I am."

The scene was shaping well for both. Mr. Gallimore's tone had raised the desired indignation in Stephen—and Stephen's news had raised a thrilling horror in Mr. Gallimore—and both were excited, alive and happy.

"Stephen, do you realize what you are saying?"

"Yes; it's not very obscure."

"You can't marry that girl."

"I can; and I have promised to."

"She can't be the mother of your children."

"Why not? She isn't deformed as far as I know."

"Don't be indecent as well as foolish. You know I dislike profanity. She's not your class."

Stephen was well prepared for this.

"Class! I can't see that we have any class, either of us. Florrie's a paid machine for handing out meals other people have cooked; and I'm a paid machine for writing letters other people have cooked. There's no difference."

"The difference! The difference is in blood. We may be poor, but we're Gallimores—one of the oldest families in the land. If we can keep nothing else, we can keep our pride, can't we?"

"I don't know that there's anything to be proud about. Every one in our position seems to have an idea that they're descended from some high and mighty family, and I dare say they all are. Florrie has a Sir Something



Bowden kicking around ; but if it's a case for pride, my pride would take the form of wanting to give the girl that loves me something of a lift in the world. It's only a lift of about two inches, but——"

This speech, being a long one, gave Mr. Gallimore, who was not listening to it, time to sharpen his next remarks to a point. Impatient to utter them, he made several starts before Stephen had finished, and now burst in :

"And do you suppose your mother and I are going to countenance this—what's quite obviously a piece of youthful folly ? Do you suppose——"

"Oh, I knew you'd say that. But I claim to have considered the engagement very carefully before I entered into it. . . . And in any case, I have given my word, and you will never induce me to go back upon my word."

Mr. Gallimore rose and stood with his back to the fire, tossing the book he had been reading into the lap of the vacated chair. It was an action to gain time.

"Pah ! It is possible to secure an honourable escape from an engagement."

"It is possible to call 'backing out' by some such pretty term ; but actually, since Florrie is very much in love with me, it would be another name for the infliction of an appalling cruelty."

"Oh, you think it would ? You value yourself pretty big."

"On the contrary, as I have been saying all along, in opposition to you, so far from being above Florrie I know I am not worthy of the—the worship she gives me. I am only glad if, in some other respect, I may have more to give her than she can give me."

Mr. Gallimore saw that he had somehow shifted his ground, and began to be bewildered. All he wanted to do was the grand thing in the grand manner—and surely that was (as they put it) "to rescue his only son from a

grave misalliance." The very words carried the patents of nobility. But dimly he suspected that his son had struck a grander chivalric note, and was doing the grand manner rather better ; dimly he thought of King Cophetua and the Beggar Maid, George IV and Mrs. Fitzherbert. . . . It was confusing. . . . But his son marry a waitress ! No, it *must* be wrong. . . . Besides, it was almost certainly a passing infatuation. And that entitled him to stand on the only ground where he could really feel secure—the ground of indignant opposition.

"We must have your mother in," said he. "Perhaps *she* can reason you out of this."

"You may discuss me as much as you like," replied Stephen, "but as long as you call it folly, it is useless to argue. And you'll never induce me to go back upon my word. I'll go out."

Which he did, calling, "Mother, Father wants to speak to you," and taking his hat into Waldron Avenue.

## II

Mr. Gallimore, waiting for his wife, was as happy, as restless, and as "up" (in Mr. Tom Bowden's tongue) as ale on a warm day. If Stephen had looked forward to a scene of dramatic disclosure and neat sword-play with his father, Mr. Gallimore was looking forward to a scene of dramatic disclosure and pregnant conspiracy with his wife. He was fast composing the part that he would play : that of a father overcoming his indignation with humorous understanding and statesmanlike tact. "The management of the boy will need care," so the phrases shaped themselves. "Tact. He must be circumvented, Ruth. It's quite a natural episode in a young man's life, and we mustn't get flurried. We must just put our heads together and consider how to save him from himself."

"This is a serious business, Ruth," began he, when his wife came in from the kitchen.



"Oh?" inquired Mrs. Gallimore.

"Yes. Stephen's entangled himself with a girl."

"Entangled? You don't mean——"

"No, no. Don't get flurried. It's just a case for tact. If he'd done that, I should insist upon his marrying her. Of course. But he's only got engaged to her. So there's no reason why we shouldn't do our best to break the connection. He must be circumvented."

"Engaged! But if he's got engaged, surely that's one reason for a start."

They stood on either side of the table, staring at each other.

"No, not at all, not at all. Not in this case. He's been a young fool and lost his head——"

"The longer I live," interrupted Mrs. Gallimore, "the more I think that we can describe any love-story in those terms—if we care to. We choose whether we will use them or not."

"But good heavens! This girl is miles beneath us. She serves in a public-house."

Mrs. Gallimore certainly gave a start; and for a while her eyes fell on the table-cloth and her thoughts to some field of her own.

"Is she younger than he?"

"Younger? Of course. She can't be more than twenty. Under age, and not responsible. We can work on that."

"Is she a good girl? I mean, is she the quiet or the bold type?"

"Quiet enough—but what's the good of all this? I shan't consent to Stephen's engagement to her."

Mrs. Gallimore smoothed a wrinkle out of the cloth.

"Do you know, I don't think I should mind, if she were good and loved him. I have thought much about Stephen's marriage. What has he to offer any girl?"

"He is a gentleman's son and should marry a lady."

"Where will he meet her—and will she marry thirty-five shillings a week? Let's be sensible, Bob——"

"But confound it! Don't you think this is serious?"

"No. Not as serious as that."

"*Well!*" In the ejaculation bewilderment and forgiveness were mixed. "Well, I can't— Here's this boy—here's Stephen—Stephen, on whom I've based my highest hopes; Stephen whom I've looked upon as a sort of throw-back to what we once were; Stephen in whom I hoped the Gallimores would come into their own again—you don't know what I've dreamed for that boy! I— This is disaster, nothing less than disaster; the death-blow to all my hopes. . . ."

"I've been watching for it, Bob. Listen. What has happened? He is young and mature, and nature must have been trying to push him towards every girl he has met. And he only meets a few. And now that it has pushed him far enough towards one, his mind has set up the necessary mirage of love."

Something like scorn twitched at Mr. Gallimore's nostrils.

"And is that your idea of love?"

"Not mine, but nature's."

"Oh. So you recognize no distinction between real love and infatuation."

"I am quite clear that one is the beautiful and one the cruel name for the same thing."

"Well, I wouldn't have your ideas for something!" He turned from them to the mantelpiece. "To me real love is a beautiful thing. The crown of life."

"So it is. I much prefer the beautiful name to the cruel. Let's sit down. I've been standing at the scullery sink till I am quite tired. I'll try to tell you what I think."

Mr. Gallimore sat down as a disappointed man sits down; and his wife sat on the edge of the opposite chair as a busy woman settles for a piece of necessary but transient work.



"I think that whenever our Stephen loves, it'll be capable of being called infatuation. And what matters is not the infatuation but that into which it will settle when its appetites have been quieted."

"Appetites! You're crude enough."

"Better to be quite crude just now. I've been thinking over this, day after day. Especially lately when he's obviously been prowling after a mate——" Mr. Gallimore recoiled again. "First, should he with his prospects marry at all?"

She left it to her husband to answer, but he, being unprepared with a clear idea, refused the invitation, demanding, "Well, *should* he?"

"Yes. Because it's the only route to unselfishness and wisdom. And to what is perhaps the only perfect thing we achieve in life—the love of our children."

Mr. Gallimore pondered these things behind a crumpled brow, and she pursued:

"He marries, then. Well, he can do three things—marry above him, below him, and his equal. I cannot see any difference in his marrying above him and below him——"

"*What!*"

"No. No difference. In either case one partner marries up and one down."

"Yes, but the point is: our boy shouldn't be the one that marries down."

"Which seems to me a very selfish point."

"But good Saints alive! Do you mean you'd be quite happy to think of Stephen marrying *down*?"

"Put it rather that I should be quite happy to think of some little girl marrying up."

"Oh! . . . But, you see, she doesn't happen to be our child, and Stephen does."

Mrs. Gallimore dropped her eyes to the carpet.

"Not for years have I looked at things like that."

"Blow me if I can see how you *do* look at things!"

## THE OLD TREE BLOSSOMED

"I know you can't. . . . Well, the third alternative is that he should marry his equal. And what Stephen's equal is, in his present position, I don't know."

Mr. Gallimore grunted, as one who thought: Well, I do. "His equal should be by birth a lady. That is all I ask." He began to feel magnanimous. "That she should be poor would not affect me. A lady, that's all."

"Then I have not the least doubt this girl will be able to prove herself that. All girls can."

"But she's—she's a *servant*, no more."

"That might make her, when the infatuation passes, proud of her husband, though he is only a clerk, and an excellent housewife for a poor man."

To this development Mr. Gallimore had seen his answer directly and was stuttering to get it out before she had finished.

"And what about Stephen? What about Stephen? By the same token he—when the infatuation passes—will be ashamed of his wife." He plumed himself on this. Was any woman ever clear-brained and logical?

Mrs. Gallimore deliberated, with her eyes seeking something far away.

"It seems to me, Bob, that every marriage, short of the few that are like prizes in a lottery, must finally resolve itself into a position where one gives more than the other and has to find her happiness in doing so. I am selfish enough to wish Stephen may be that one. I hope to be able to show him that it can be singularly happy."

Mr. Gallimore looked up at her. She had said this as if she were speaking from personal experience. Did she mean . . . ?

"Oh, really! And in your marriage, for instance, which part do you think you have filled?"

"I have been singularly happy," smiled she.

"D's that mean you have given more than I have?"

"I should like Stephen—yes, I should like him to be



the one that gives more, but I doubt if he will, being the man. Anyhow, he must give something, and if his wife gives toleration, why shouldn't he give position?"

"Never mind Stephen. Do you think you have given more than I have—that's what I want to know."

"Yes, dear."

"You do, do you? Confound it. . . . I must say I can't see it——"

"No, dear. I know you can't."

"Never mind all that 'No-dear-I-know-you-can't!' The question is, is it there to be seen at all? I have struggled hard and fought for you all my life. I have never been unfaithful to you as other men might have been. I've never gambled or drunk. I've given you a good name——"

"There are things that are harder to give than any of those: patience, and understanding, and forgiveness——"

"*Forgiveness!* Forgive the devil! What have you got to forgive me?"

Mrs. Gallimore laughed merrily. "Nothing, dear. Forgive ' was the wrong word. . . . It slipped out. I meant 'understanding.' You'll admit you need understanding, won't you? All men admit that."

"Well, I wish you'd say what you mean," grumbled Mr. Gallimore. But he was mollified; he was content to need understanding.

"No, I think quite the best thing to do about Stephen is to accept the engagement until we have seen a good deal of this girl. If she's good and loves him, we may be able to build a big success out of it——"

"But I tell you I have seen her, and that I will never give my consent. You don't seem to see that this is the greatest blow I have ever taken in my life. I hoped we should have just put our heads together and considered how to save the boy from himself. . . . You have no pride. No pride."

"Perhaps I haven't," agreed Mrs. Gallimore.

## THE OLD TREE BLOSSOMED

Mr. Gallimore's scene was not so successful as Stephen's. It had no effective conclusion.

### III

Left alone, he stood wondering. It was not true that love was a mirage raised by the mind round the physical desire. Showed how little Ruth knew about it ! Hadn't he been silently in love, for five years, with the distant Laurie Cluer ; and weren't the few letters she had written him (commencing so charmingly, " Dear Lord Sennen ") folded away in his letter-case ; and yet his love had no connection with physical desire ? He had only wanted to be all in all to some one, and to have some one in his thoughts to worship. He would have given Ruth this example from his own feelings, only it had been hardly possible, seeing she was his wife. Say what you liked, a wife could never be such a resting place for your love ; not after the first year ; not to the huge majority of men. A wife's love, as a man got older, must turn to indifference or to the affection of a mother or sister ; and that was not what his whole being cried out for. A strange world, so unfeeling towards one's hunger for perfection ; why was one given this power to see always the pure, white thing, and sentenced to live always with everything just soiled and frayed ?

The adoration of a young, fresh, beautiful woman, why did the longing for this torture him ? And because none such came to him, he would hold tight to the memories of that pleasing figure, set in a picture of sunlit Cornish seas. Five years had passed, and she was no longer young. Thirty-five she must be, but that would be young enough for him, if only he were sure of her worship. " Dear Lord Sennen "—was it not patent that she began thus because she could not write anything so cold as " Dear Mr. Gallimore," and must not write " Dear Robert " ? And next year she would be back from Persia. Thirty-six. A woman such as she could be most adorable



at thirty-six. And he would be fifty-two. Other men had known love at fifty-two. The great Earl of Chatham, was he not one? Next year, what might not happen then? What gracious fugitive hours might not be given him—what memories lighting the rest of his life with the certainty that once he had known the fullness of love?

Ah, but he was thinking about himself instead of about Stephen. About Stephen, now . . .

The adoration of a Laurie Cluer—why did the need for it swell in him, especially when he was tired, as to-night? Why did . . . But about Stephen. . .

Gestation began in his mind. Fine speeches were gestating there; and he sat down as a kind of accoucheement, in which he could be delivered of the coming family. "Stephen. Listen, my boy. Let us discuss this matter calmly and lucidly and—" there was a good word coming—"and *dispassionately*. If I urge delay and—and *circumspection*, it is only because there is nothing so close to my heart as your welfare, your happiness, your success. It is far dearer to me than my own. *I—*" he spread a melancholy palm—"I am growing old. I have rounded the corner of middle age and I daresay I have shot my bolt. I have good gifts, but I was gravely handicapped in many ways. Very many ways. But *you*—you are only twenty-two. You have all life before you. Anything may happen—" but here Stephen, so swift and autonomous was his father's creative energy, broke in most distinctly and characteristically with a "Yes, but *what?*" This unanswerable "What" Mr. Gallimore waved to one side with his palm. "Anything, my boy. Openings. Fine careers are largely good fortune. In my case, I had so many ties. I had to help my mother. I had to struggle for my wife and you, but I don't regret it. Struggle is the salt of life, and I believe that even in my narrow sphere, I have done something to serve my day and generation. . ."

## CHAPTER V

### *Mr. Tom Bowden's Congratulations*

#### I

WHEN Florrie's engagement was announced to her father, and the ring showed to him, while Stephen stood awkwardly by, Mr. Bowden nodded many times as a preliminary to speech. It was evening, and the trained eye of his wife, if not Stephen's, could see that he was already diluted into the rich, fluid consistency that was his usual state by supper time.

"I'm very glad," he said. "Very proud. I'm sure I hope you'll both be happy. Stephen, my boy, say what you like, you got a fine girl; and Florrie, you got a fine boy—I don't care *what* you say!"

"I think I'm the lucky one," offered Stephen, generously.

"No, I wouldn't say that," objected Mr. Bowden, meditatively. "No. It's honours easy, I should say. Sixer one and halfer dozen the other. Isn't it, Molly? Nothing to choose in it. . . ."

"Oh, I don't know," dissented Florrie.

"Well, whadder we do now? Missus, whadder we do now?"

"Let's sit down, at any rate," laughed Mrs. Bowden.

They sat down and felt rather foolish. There was silence, none having a practical answer to Mr. Bowden's question. He was the first to reach an answer.

"Stephen, you must have a drink with me. It's a great day. I reckon it's a case for a beer-up, if ever there was one."

"Oh, no, thanks," begged Stephen.



## MR. TOM BOWDEN'S CONGRATULATIONS

"We 'aven't got any in the house, 'ave we, Molly? I like it on draught, meself. Well"—he winked at Stephen—"come round to the Arms. Come along to the Bishop's Arms, and wet it there."

"No, he doesn't want to go to that place," protested Mrs. Bowden.

"'Ow do you know 'e doesn't? Let him speak for himself. It's the proper place for married men, I always say. When you grow tired of your wife's arms, try the Bishop's. It's wonderful the consolation there is in 'em. And they're always open and welcoming, which is more than you can say of any wife's. You wait and see, melad. Come along, Stephen, I'd like to treat you; I'd like to treat you meself."

"No, I don't think so, thank you very much," persisted Stephen.

"Right. I'll go and get it. I'll get a brace of bottles."

"Please don't trouble about me."

"Yes, I should like to treat you. It's a great day, all said and done. I shan't be long. Molly must have a pull too; and Florrie. We'll all have a pull."

Since there was no stopping him, Stephen smiled his consent, and dreamed of the time when he should have broken all connection with his father-in-law. Conversation was only spasmodic in his absence, and it was almost a relief when he returned with two bottles hooked between his fingers.

"This is wine from the Off Licence. It's a case for wine, not beer. It's above beer. And when I say a thing's above beer, it's the highest praise there is. It's only a marriage, or a legacy, that soars above beer. This is Lisbon Wine. Now then, charge the glasses, as the saying goes. 'Ere's to it, everybody."

They sipped the cheap red wine, except Mr. Bowden, who got it down in two gulps, wiped his lips, swallowed some air, shook his head and said, "No, give me beer, any day." After that, the conversation languished again,

its prime mover having lapsed into reverie. Rising out of this he began to send his eyes ever and anon towards the door, as if something outside were gathering in attractiveness with the passage of time. "I think," said he, at last, "I think I'll leave you to it, now. You won't want me. I'll leave you to it."

Three minutes later he was entering the Saloon Bar of the Bishop's Arms.

"Hallo, Tom," hailed the landlord.

"Scotch and Polly," said Mr. Bowden. "Gimme a Scotch and Polly. This is a great day for me."

"Scotch and Polly," echoed the landlord, and served him, heedless of his second remark.

Mr. Bowden took the glass. "Yes, this is a great day for me," he repeated with a ruminant shake of the head.

But the landlord, busy with the wiping and replacing of glasses, had ears for orders only, not for the marginal comments. Mr. Bowden perceived he would have to buy his audience.

"Here, 'ave one with me, Eddy."

"Thank you, Tom." Promptly the landlord mixed himself a drink.

"Yes, this is a great day for me."

"Oh?"

"Yes. It's my girl."

"What's she done?"

"She's got engaged. Got properly engaged."

"Do we know the happy man?"

"No . . . No, Eddy. . . ." Mr. Bowden deliberated how he could hint that his son-in-law's level was far above the landlord's, without hurting that powerful friend. "He's a gentleman, if ever there was one."

"You must bring him round."

"I'm afraid he's not the sort that drinks in a pub. No, I can't see Stephen drinking in a pub."

"What is he? A duke?"

"No, he's only just an Esquire. Just Esquire. But



## MR. TOM BOWDEN'S CONGRATULATIONS

a very old family—French, in the nature of things, as all the real nobs are. I always said Florrie'd marry well."

"Well, I'm glad, Tom."

"Yes, it'll be a big wedding, I expect. I'm glad to see her take her rightful place. I never been able to do enough for her."

Here a man, drinking on his right and listening, which is the privilege carried by a bar-counter, interpolated :

"'Ow did she get 'im ?"

"'Ow *should* she get 'im ?" It was unfortunate that the interrupter should have asked his question just as Mr. Bowden, with a pull on the whisky, entered the sentimental-quarrelsome mood. "She's a beautiful girl, my Florrie, and likely to nab anyone. You're not insinuating anything about her, are you ? Because I don't take insinuations about Florrie. Not where my dor'er's concerned."

"No insinuations, mate."

"No. I'm glad of that. She got him quite natural. She met him, and he met her, and there you are. . . . He's with her now. . . . Florrie don't pick up fellows the way you mean. She's the knife sort, my Florrie. It's her knivety wot gets 'em, I think—though she don't know it—she wouldn't be knife if she did. . . . He's with her now. . . . Seeing 'em together I could have wep', I tell you. It's a real love match. First to last, it's a real love match."

"When's the wedding to be ?" put in the landlord.

"You'd better be getting the new hat."

"I'm thinking," said Mr. Bowden, pathetically—"I'm thinking I may not go to the wedding. I've nothing to go in, and I've no money. And I'm not going to shame Florrie. 'S'no good pretending I'm the same class as her man, because I'm not—not now, that is. He's the proper Esquire, and I'm only a working man, if you come down to hard tacks. It brings it home to one when one's girl

## THE OLD TREE BLOSSOMED

marries as Florrie's marrying. And then she's well known at her church, where they think all the world of her, and it wouldn't do for her to be seen with a shabby old father. Maybe I'll watch from the back of the church and see 'er come down the ile, or I'll stand with the crowd and see her come out. It'll be a great day for her, and I'm not going to spoil it. 'Er mother can go. Women can raise clothes out of nothing."

"That's all barney, Tom," laughed the landlord. "You'll have to give her away on your arm."

"Not without a frock coat, Eddy," announced Mr. Bowden, finally. "*And* a tile."

"Yes, you'll want a tile," agreed the landlord.

"*And* a frock coat. When Florrie goes up the ile, she shall put her little arm on the sleeve of a frock coat, or on nothing at all. That I swear."

"'Ire 'em," suggested the humourist on the right.

"No, Florrie don't go to 'er fate with her arm on a 'ired sleeve. That I swear. She can only be married once, in the nature of things. It'd be a shame if she were not done properly."

"Aye, it'd be that," agreed the man.

"Besides, Stephen's used to having things done in a good class style. He'll want it swell. I mustn't let *him* down, either—yer see, Eddy."

"We'll tie them up all right, don't you worry," humoured the landlord. "And anyhow, she shall be toasted properly to-night. Have this over again with me."

"Thanks, Eddy," accepted Mr. Bowden, sniffing back his emotion. "You're a good friend. . . . Yes, I could have wep' when I seen 'em . . ."

"Here's to your girl, Tom, and her fancy man."

Mr. Bowden lifted his glass.

"Florrie . . . Stephen," toasted he; and they drank together.



## CHAPTER VI

### *One of Mr. Gallimore's Moments*

**A**S with the passing days Mr. Gallimore saw that Stephen would marry Florrie in the teeth of his opposition, he secretly decided to give his consent in time. He would maintain the traditional opposition of the father as long as possible, and then make the traditional surrender to his daughter-in-law's charms and give a blessing to the union. If a ball that you meant to throw in one direction unhappily flies in another, you had best look as if it were doing what you desired, and bless its passage.

So for some weeks he maintained the dark and lowering disapproval in order that the final surrender might be more effective. He was an artist in chiaroscuro. Florrie coming quite often to supper now, he let his displeasure blow over the meal like a black flag. But it was done with unfailing courtesy, he hoped. Behind his heavy silences he was really picturing a scene in which this delightful girl-child came to him in an agony of despair and cried: "You don't want me to marry your son! I know you don't! I feel it!" to which, silence being the only answer his compassion would suffer, she would add piteously, "Oh, I will be a good wife to him! I will be a good wife to him!" Then, suddenly, with a smile, he would take the little girl into his arms and forgive her. He would kiss her forehead and welcome her as his daughter, and she would love him all the more for the cloud that was overpast. A daughter to love him worshippingly! Mr. Gallimore, dwelling on this, felt a warm emotion surging.

## THE OLD TREE BLOSSOMED

But the days passed, and the suppers passed, and Florrie made no such advance. Rather did she seem shy and afraid of him, as he sat at the table with his well-made silences. A pain and a fear grew in him lest she was learning to dislike him. What to do? In the confused soil of his mind there had rooted the idea that his dignity demanded a humble petitioning from her, before the consent, with which he was now bursting, could be ceremonially given. But, by the rate Stephen was traveling, it looked as if he would get married without having afforded his father this opportunity of consenting. Even now the couple would actually discuss their future home while the father's brow was still beetling over their suppers. "We'll rent a house," Florrie would say, "and let it off, except a couple of rooms for ourselves. I shall be able to look after all the lodgers as well as our two rooms, and so I shall earn the rent and perhaps a little more. Oh yes, I can. It'll be nothing after the Shakespeare Head." Across his very silences they would talk thus enthusiastically with that rather irritating person, his wife. I can understand that Mr. Gallimore was vexed with Florrie. Here was he with his little charade all composed, and she would not give him the necessary cue for his speech and his "business."

He rebuked his wife about it, upstairs in their bedroom. "I think, I must say, that you might support me in my attitude. You don't seem to realize—by the way you encourage them to talk—that I haven't yet given my consent."

"But you haven't forbidden it."

"No, I haven't forbidden it," replied he, as if he fully believed that this would have stopped everything at once. "But I think you might act as a brake a bit. The girl ought to *feel* more that she is marrying into a family that is higher than her own. It will make her appreciate Stephen."

His wife, who was now looking into her glass as she



brushed her thin grey hairs, shook her head at the whole reflected room.

"She must never feel that we are ashamed of her . . . even if we were."

"Oh, you are impossible to talk to! I am speaking to you to get some sympathy, not disagreement."

"I am getting very fond of Florrie," continued Mrs. Gallimore, placidly brushing. "And I believe that if we can find them a house near us, and I can see a lot of her, I could—I could influence her a great deal, and perhaps do something towards making them a very happy couple. She will not know it, but I shall be moulding her. It all turns so much on the woman, you see."

Eventually he was obliged to take the first step himself. One evening after supper, when Stephen and Ruth were out of the room, and Florrie was sitting before him, self-consciously turning the pages of a *Pearson's Weekly*, he looked up from his novel and said, "Florrie."

Her face lifted to his.

"Hadn't we better be friends if you really want to be my daughter?"

Florrie stared, and gradually the fear in her eyes changed to pleasure. "Oh yes, I want to be—I do so want to be. But I was afraid you didn't like me. It's been the only miserable thing about it all."

Happy admission! Mr. Gallimore warmed to a love: she had said what he wanted; she had said that she had felt his disapproval and longed for it to pass; she had liberated him to go forward and take the treasure of her affection.

"But I do like you," he smiled. "Perhaps I didn't want to at first, but you have quite conquered me. I am not the sort that makes new affections easily. I am the kind that goes slowly, but when I go, I go sure and far." (He had a sense that all this, before a more critical audience, would savour of bombast, but not with Florrie; she was drinking it into delighted eyes.) "I have been

watching you a lot, and I think I am very happy that my boy should have won so dear a little wife and myself so dear a daughter. I have always wanted a daughter. I think every man does."

Her eyes shone. Never had he had such an audience.

"You see, Florrie, if one is a man of strong emotions as I am—yes, I think I may say I am that—one needs the devotion of tender, feminine things. Why it should be so I do not presume to say. It's not *my* arrangement; it's just the nature of things. P'r'aps it's because so much of a man's life is warfare and worry and obstruction that he is so often homesick for his one natural resting-place, which is the—the embrace of gentle, pleasing creatures like you." ("I have seldom phrased a sentence so well," thought Mr. Gallimore.) "Personally, I never had even a sister. I should have loved a sister. But there! How can you understand? . . . It just means that you must try to love me a little, Florrie. Will you try?"

"Oh yes, but I do. And I love Mrs. Gallimore. I think she is the sweetest woman I have ever known."

This rebutted him for a moment. It was not of his wife that he had been speaking. But since the black flag appeared to have yielded place to a gay bunting of generosity, he put out a few more pennons.

"Yes, my wife is a fine character, the best of the bunch of us. I wish we were all on her level."

"She is wonderful."

Mr. Gallimore stood up. The truth was, he was swelling with a desire to ask for a kiss, and the embrace he pictured was not possible from an easy chair. But he was diffident, and fiddled with the ornaments on the mantelpiece. "I only hope Stephen will be a less irritable and exacting husband than I have been."

"I don't mind what he is!"

"Do you really feel like that about him?"

"Yes. Oh yes."



"We men are not worthy of the love you women give us. When shall we see it?"

No triteness would Florrie perceive in this, but beauty only; that was clear from her beaming smile. Never, never had he enjoyed such a listener.

"I have waited for your coming ever since Stephen was born, Florrie—think of that! I saw you in the distance when he was only a little child, and I tried to distinguish your shape. I pictured you in many guises, but always with a very great love. I—I am like that. And I always saw you as beautiful. I could not conceive that you would be anything else . . . and now I think that you are every bit as pretty as I foresaw. It makes me very happy. You see, I was never blessed with a daughter, so I had to think, 'Never mind, Stephen will marry one day, and then she'll come, and she'll——' So you must try your best to be fond of me."

"Oh, but I am!"

"Come—kiss me."

Florrie jumped up, and he drew her against his breast, surprised at the tightness with which he caught her and the sudden sweet dryness in his throat. She kissed him, innocently as a child, on his mouth, and he held her still tighter as he kissed her brow. Somehow all his longing for ineffable, perfect things was poured into that kiss he gave to Florrie.

"God bless you, Florrie." He had to clear his throat, and his voice came huskily. "You'll have to be patient and forgiving with young Stephen, if he's like me . . ."

Loath to let her go, he patted her back as she leaned against him. Nor, to his infinite delight, did she seem eager to escape, but held him, as if she too were pouring some emotion into her embrace; and he kept her there, sometimes resting his lips upon her hair. Memory could sweep the whole range of his life and find no happier moment.

## CHAPTER VII

### *How to Escape from Reality*

#### I

MR. TOM BOWDEN need not have worried about his silk hat and frock coat, for the vision in which these were central luminaries was as remote from the reality of things as any of Mr. Gallimore's or Stephen's will-o'-the-wispy dreams. Stephen and Florrie were married quietly at St. Clement's, Fulham, with only their parents as witnesses. After a fortnight by the sea, they came quietly to their anchorage in No. 17 English Road.

English Road was a street of narrow, uniform, stucco-faced houses, larger than the "desirable residences" in Waldron Avenue, but much less desirable and therefore even cheaper. Of the three floors of No. 17, Stephen and Florrie used the two rooms and the kitchen on the ground floor and prepared the upper floors for apartments. English Road! It was not ill-named, being a street typical of those thousands into which, during our latter days, the adventurous English have taken their restiveness and their dreams. Into his ground-floor living-room Stephen took his love for Florrie and his doubts of her. There, for a while, he will stay out of our sight. He is caught, more than ever now, in that crowding, colourless life which the London Underground tosses over its grey banks; he is manacled to four of its walls. Let him abide there till the time comes to tell how he escaped at last. We can imagine him, if we like, appearing sometimes on the platform of Bealing Station and joining his father on the eight-fifteen to town. The two exchange greetings and travel together, saying little or nothing.



Meanwhile, Mr. Gallimore, without Stephen, without his new "little daughter," with no beautiful women entering his cloistered days, could do nothing but swing his thoughts back to his one magnetic pole, Laurie Cluer on her poplared tableland of Persia. There was nowhere else for the beam of his searchlight to rest. *Had* she loved him during that fortnight? *Had* he just for that little while possessed her love? For the five-hundredth time he reviewed all those words and passages they had exchanged in the sunlight of Sennen Cove. If only the assurance would come to him that she had loved him for a period then, and that consequently he had a tender place in her memory now, it would stay this gnawing doubt lest he had missed the fine flower of life.

His need for some such assurance was throbbing all the more painfully since he had seen Florrie's worshipping eyes at rest upon Stephen. He wanted himself to be the centre of such a gaze—once more in his life—just once more. And if he were to meet Laurie again, would he see it, or a shadow of it, in her eyes?

And day followed day, each the same as its predecessor: the train, the office-work, the lonely thoughts, an evening at home, and sleep. The days built up their weeks, and the weeks aligned into months, and nothing happened. Well, this was ninety-and-nine parts of life. Only once in a hundred days, or less often, was the chance of a fine and vivid thing offered to men.

The chance came in March of the following year. It came in a letter from her. "I am returning home for three months. I leave Hamadan for the Caspian next week. We really must, for old acquaintance' sake, try to see something of each other. I shall only have a week or two in town, as Felicia and I at the first breath of summer, shall be off to Cornwall. You can't think how excited I am at the prospect of seeing you again, my dear Lord Sennen."

"You can't think how excited . . ." Again and again

the delighted lover examined this sentence, holding it to the light, like a specimen on a slide, or submitting it to the microscope. In his resolve to find the bacillus of love somewhere in its heart, he chose to treat the common, colloquial phrase in its literalness. "You can't think . . ." Then her excitement was something that could not be thought; what did this suggest but the disturbances of love? Was it possible that she not only *had* loved him in that fortnight, but, during all the years that followed, had kept him on the throne?

Just as the moral effect of a new suit on Mr. Gallimore was to make him feel a self-disciplined, successful, capable person, so the effect of thinking that he was loved could transfigure very brightly his image of himself. As he sat in the train, reflecting on that letter, he was seeing himself, not as a fattish man of fifty-three, but as a fine, big, well-dressed animal in the prime of life; not stout, so much as big. It was a distinctly fine man he saw.

And all that day, as he signed the letters written by the clerks, he was thinking less of Leicester's epistolary difficulties than of the new suit he would purchase now, after postponing the expenditure for years in anticipation of this day; of the expensive luncheon at an hotel to which he would invite her, the first Saturday after her arrival; of a Sunday in the country which would be soft with spring; of a gathering tenderness as the sun declined; and lastly of the parting ere she left for Sennen—a moment that would be very poignant and wholly enjoyable. He had no fear that she would expect to come to his home, and so learn the truth about his position in the world; she would feel for the difficulties of an honourable married man who was hardly to blame if, in spite of himself, he loved another woman as well as his wife. There would be only tenderness between them; no—well, nothing more. It was only tenderness that he wanted. Perhaps, in the hour of parting, they might be overborne by an uprush of feeling into an illicit embrace



## HOW TO ESCAPE FROM REALITY

before they knew what had happened. If so, what a moment it would be ! Let him be given it, and he would ask no more of life. Ever after he would be able to think of her in her distant land and know that she had the same memory of him.

### II

This is the story of the secret life of Mr. Gallimore and his son Stephen, and we must not shrink from the most disconcerting revelations. I have now to record an astonishing thing.

As that April Wednesday drew nearer that was to bring Laurie Cluer to England, he found himself as nervous as a child before a recitation on the concert stage. He had horrid moments of clearing sight when he suspected that, at the luncheon, they would be ill at ease, empty of conversation, conscious of an untraceable disappointment, and anxious to part ; that, during the remaining days of her weeks in town, he would be as eager to avoid her as to meet her ; and that he would not recover his ease again till she was safely in the train for Land's End, or, better still, back as a dream-figure on her tableland in Persia. Mr. Gallimore had the vision to see that if he met the Laurie Cluer of his secret thoughts, he would lose her.

By the Monday afternoon his nervousness was at its most unpleasant. What on earth would they talk about ? . . . there would be periods of intolerable pause . . . there would be forced gaiety . . . there would be furtive looks at the clock . . . there would be, in her mind and his, for ever after, a memory of a fiasco to obliterate the memories of success. Still, he must go through with it now . . . or should he not ? Should he escape from it ? Horrid fact that this idea of escape should fill him with a glowing relief ! So much so, that, having handled it for a minute, he could not let it go ! " Oh, yes, yes, how much better to leave things as they are ! "

The next day he wrote a letter to Laurie Cluer's London address, beginning, "Oh, cruel, cruel fate!" and deploring that relentless business should drive him north, to Edinburgh and Aberdeen, just as she was coming home. And it would keep him there for a month or more! It was too grievous a blow!

On re-reading the letter, he was not displeased that she should think of him as having large interests in the north; it was in keeping with the rôle he had played before her. He had but one fear: lest her love should cause her to flit about the entrances to Leicester's, as he, were he to go to Persia while she was away, would certainly flit about the house where she had lived. She could not visit Waldron Avenue because he had invariably headed his letters with the address of his firm. But if she *were* to hang about Leicester's and see him entering the back door in Two Shilling Lane, when he was supposed to be in Scotland! What say to her then? How stammer an explanation? . . . The thought stunned one from thinking it!

For a fortnight and more he walked very quickly from Sloane Square Station to Leicester's; he kept his face down during the walk, that the brim of his bowler might be a mask to his eyes; under that mask he swung his glance furtively right and left; sometimes he rested a reflective hand on his cheek as a natural curtain to his features; he hurried under cover—and as I watch him disappearing into safety, I know I am glad I have given you the truth of the matter; because somewhere in such anxious, energetic movements to salve his dreams the best of you may track something fine. He did not meet her, and she remained the Laurie Cluer of Sennen Cove and Hamadan.



PART III

*THE CONFLICT Wavers*





## CHAPTER I

### *Full Grown*

THE year 1914 dawned to find Mr. Gallimore sixty years old and retired on a pension. The first morning of 1914 was the first morning that he did not take the 8.15 to town. The previous night at six o'clock he had laid down his pen after devoting it for forty-five years to the service of Leicester's. The clerks, who had made him a present of a huge timepiece, gave him three cheers and stood in a row to shake his hand as he passed out. His good heart was much moved and the tears were not far from his eyes. At the door he took a last look round the office, smiled wanly, and let the door swing behind him.

Up to this point his emotions had been perfectly genuine, but the fine drama of this last action appealed to him, and he determined that much more could be made of this farewell evening. Sitting in the train with Stephen, he produced a certain studied pensiveness and a certain gazing out of the window while his newspaper lay unread upon his knees.

"I wouldn't have thought I could have felt it so much, Stephen," said he, somewhere about Gloucester Road, for he felt that his son should be given the key to his silence. "I should have thought that it would seem like an escape, but at the minute it seems more like an exile. Forty-five years! The best part of my life. Forty-five years! Think of it!"

He thought of it in silence for the rest of the way home, composing the sentences that he would utter to Ruth at periods during the following day, and designing

a necessary stage-business of wandering and restlessness. "I'm quite at a loose end, Ruth. . . . An old horse put out to grass. When I think of young Stephen setting off to work as usual, I feel restive like a retired charger smelling the hunt in the distance. . . . It feels strange to have no harness on one's back, and never to expect it any more. . . . Yes, the old wind-jammer has come to its last moorings . . . It's the 'sere and yellow' now."

Reading became the main occupation of his retired days. No woman travelled her eyes more regularly along the high walls of books in the Bealing Lending Library. He would take three or four away at a time, and begin reading the first of them as he sauntered along the pavements to his home. And the Serpent, ever as interested in Mr. Gallimore as any other of his subjects—and perhaps more so, now that he was retired—was quick to see in this garden of pleasant literature a favourable place for his appearing. As young and impish, as slippery and subtle in 1914—which, to be sure, was an active, exciting, festival year for him—as ever he was in the dawn of things when he blinked his pawky eye at Eve, he watched Mr. Gallimore browsing along the shelves of the Library and, at a suitable moment, slipped among the luscious fruit on that laden wood an apple from the dangerous tree. As a rule Mr. Gallimore chose nothing but novels, and novels of a romantic sort; which amounts to saying that he read only what was on the side of the angels. But to-day—it was the 4th February, 1914—he took out three novels and a book entitled "Full Grown"; and this book, though he did not know it, believing it to be a novel, was as much the fine fruit and fulfilment of the knowledge of good and evil as an apple is the fine fruit and fulfilment of its tree. It was therefore quite out of place on the fiction shelf, but that was the devil's doing.

"Full Grown," when Mr. Gallimore read it in his arm-chair, proved to be the book that played a greater havoc in his thinking than all its ten thousand brothers



and sisters who had preceded it into his life. It was by a woman. Of a truth, the analogy between the garden that the Lord God planted eastward in Eden and the Lending Library that the Corporation planted in Bealing High Street was well-nigh perfect; it was a woman, one Vera Standing, who held before the eyes of Mr. Gallimore this apple from the knowledgeable tree. Not that it was a frivolous book; it was a fine piece of criticism from an enlightened brain. And it was so lucidly and attractively written that Mr. Gallimore had no difficulty in following its paths with pleasure. It was the first book that taught him he could enjoy essays as much as fiction.

The theme of "Full Grown" was simply this: that Man, as long as he submits to the inhibitions of religion and the gyves of conventional morals—"as long," said the book, "as he suffers his standard pattern to be determined by the terrified and tyrannical conservatism of sheltered women, who make up, in the mass, the Old Bathing Woman of civilization, holding it on a rope from adventuring beyond the shallows of living"—as long as he submits to them and to the creeds and conventions they have forced upon the world, he is still a repressed child; but when he shakes his shoulders free, and allows no other restraining bonds than the self-made chains of courtesy and kindness, he is at last full-grown. All things are then permissible to him; all things but cruelty and meanness. Let him live deeply, fully, unrepentantly.

The theme of course had been stated before—indeed, it was first propounded by the serpent in Eden and, later on, was the best part of the subject matter of the Renaissance—but Mr. Gallimore was not to understand that. He was amazed that people had such views, and not displeased; nor was he without the pleasant stirrings of anticipation. He felt his shoulders beginning to shake themselves free of all the feminine creeds, save only those of courtesy and kindness, and they, thank God, were

part of his nature and could never be lost. He read on avidly. "I am being convinced," he told himself. "The book is convincing me." And when he had finished, he laid "Full Grown" on the table, and meditated for several minutes, nodding his surrender. Then he announced to himself, "It is all absolutely right; it is all terribly true. Here am I—let me face up to the facts bravely, as she says I should—here am I, I have allowed my whole life to be emasculated by inhibitions, I have been a repressed child, never advancing to full growth, I have been a perfect slave to the Old Bathing Woman. And I might have swum out into the deep waters. I should have done, I think; my nature seems to have been always urging me to. I have not lived." Yes, Mr. Gallimore, at sixty, announced that he had not yet lived.

Many thoughts crowded for admission in that moment of discovery. He felt excessively annoyed with the Church and the Chapel for having deliberately stunted his growth; he felt excessively annoyed with his wife for being such a fool as to believe all that they said in churches and chapels, and for having influenced him towards the standard morality and the Old Bathing Woman all his life; he felt rather proud to be among those who read these stiff books; and he felt a sudden contempt for his present minister, the Rev. James Brewer, of the Bealing Congregational Church.

"Good heavens! it is almost wicked to belong to an organization for holding back the development of Man. It's like tying up a rose-bud to prevent its opening. It's like shutting out the light to keep it from becoming full-blown. 'Full Blown'—that would have been a better title for this book. . . . 'Full Blown'—I ought to have been a writer, as Laurie said."

He got up and walked about. To think that, had he known, he might have lived abundantly all this time, "expressing himself" and not "repressing himself" as the book phrased it! Gracious! he might have gone



## FULL GROWN

forward courageously and captured Laurie's love. Timidity and hesitation had lost him that. She was an artist, and artists, as this book suggested, were the one people who were really full-grown, thinking free and living free. Hadn't she hinted to him of the full bright life they lived in London? Hadn't she sketched for him a brilliant night scene with illuminated gold-fish in its centre, and he had said so simply that it must have been quite an orgy! How *childish* he must have sounded to her! Plague take it, she must have felt *sorry* for him!

At any rate he would live now. Sixty. He might still gamble on twenty years of life. Possibly twenty-five. He would begin to live.

"Full Grown" had defined the complete life as "full awareness." One grew more and more alive as one established contact with more and more knowledge, became capable of loftier and wider ideas, and developed intenser, profounder powers of emotion. To do this one had to go to the great authors and the great artists because they, in the past, had been the instruments of higher sensibility and awareness, and from them one caught something of their vision and much of their emotional response. From them one learnt, not only to feel about more things, but to feel more about them. And not till one had trafficked with all, or nearly all, the greatest, could one believe one had learned to live. This was their gift to us—vision, and the power to live deeper; not a few hours of diverting entertainment or a few hours of consolation.

It was a new idea to Mr. Gallimore, who had always imagined one read novels for entertainment. But then, all his ideas had been wrong, he saw: only this morning, at sixty, had he grown out of childhood. Hitherto he had read for the story; now he was going to read for the vision. And he had read all the wrong things: shirking the greatest writers for the very reason that they were classics, he had missed the vision. Oh, why had

not this book come his way forty years before? What a difference it might have made! How he would have educated himself! Convinced, as every healthy man is, that it was only bad luck that had kept him back from ranking with the greatest, he asked himself, "What might I not have done?"

At the end of this excellent volume was a whole list of works which, said the authoress, one must have read before one could call oneself full-grown. Mr. Gallimore's heart sank as he scanned the table of names and titles. Shakespeare and Dickens were the only ones he had heard of.

"I am not educated. I am simply not educated—it's no good funking it," said Mr. Gallimore at sixty. "From to-day I begin to educate myself."



## CHAPTER II

### *The Renaissance of Mr. Gallimore*

#### I

WITH exactly the same pleasure as a child feels when he is planning a new and elaborate game, he drew up a *List of Authors* and a *Time Table of Subjects*. And in obedience to this list and table he drove through a selection of Shakespeare's plays, Milton's "Paradise Lost," and Sir Thomas Browne's "Religio Medici" and "Hydrotaphia."

He found Shakespeare something of an obstacle race. Haunted by the idea that, having begun forty-five years too late, he would have to read rather fast, he referred to no notes or books of exegesis, and so was often moved to tears of vexation that these poets could take such a wilful delight in being unintelligible. On the other hand, he glimpsed not seldom the lambent lights of beauty and acclaimed them with the superlatives of a schoolgirl, hurrying with the book into the kitchen that he might share his joys with Ruth. Sometimes, I must confess, he was disturbed by the coarse outspokenness of the poet. Jack Falstaff gave him ten or a dozen nasty jars ; and the words "whoreson" and the like troubled him to the end. "Loose, very loose," Mr. Gallimore would define such writing, and he would say he had not realized Shakespeare could be so fast. But these passages did not, I am sorry to say, make his reading of Shakespeare any more difficult ; rather they encouraged him to proceed.

"Paradise Lost" he read through from the first line to the last ; and very, very often, during this arduous but

indomitable journey, did he see with shining eyes the phosphorescence of beauty. He had a congratulatory word for Milton. "The man is never fast like Shakespeare, I am glad to find; though there's a passage in the fourth book that I, personally, should have treated differently or omitted altogether. But he has refinement, you can't get away from that; he's never vulgar. Vulgar-ity I do not like, and it's no good pretending I do." It was a big moment when he read the closing words and knew that he had joined that tiny minority which has read "Paradise Lost" to the end. He felt an enlargement, an exaltation, and a considerable pity for his wife. These people whose only reading was light novels, what did they know of the sublimer beauty?

Sir Thomas Browne gave him periods of frowning bewilderment and exasperation, which he would have admitted to nobody; but though he knew he was only understanding two sentences in ten, he had a real appreciation for the rolling music of the prose. And one evening, sitting opposite his wife whose head was bent over a novel, he came to the great thunderous passage: "I take my circle to be above three hundred and sixty; though the number of the arc do measure my body, it comprehendeth not my mind; whilst I study to find how I am a Microcosm or little world, I find myself something more than the great. There is surely a piece of Divinity in us; something that was before the elements and knows no homage unto the sun"; and, notwithstanding he had but a poor idea what it was all about, his ear heard it reverberating to its close; and its majesty prompted him to look over his pince-nez at Ruth and ask, "How can you read that sort of trash when there's stuff like this to read?"

Some reference in a critical article—for he read them now—sent him to Herbert Spencer, and for three weeks he pushed and laboured his way through "First Principles." Finding that he could understand at least



two-thirds of it, he read it with thrills of admiration, both for the book and for himself. If his wife came in as he sat frowning over the large, dirty, second-hand volume, he would say with outward irritation and inward pride, "I wish you could arrange that I am disturbed as little as possible. This is not easy reading." And when he had finished, having read every sentence of it—and many sentences five or ten times—he felt what every man feels after completing Herbert Spencer's "First Principles": that he knew everything that was to be known about the construction of the universe.

But though, with Spencer as his dragoman, he had been shown the whole cosmic order in a single conspectus, and even strained his eyes into the mists on the frontier of thought, behind which the Unknowable Absolute was hiding, he could still be ashamed at his ignorance of more local sproutings like the works of living writers. So, learning that there were to be some University Extension Lectures in Bealing Town Hall on "Five Modern Masters," he bought his ticket for the course; and, when his wife showed but a dwarfish desire to accompany him, he enacted by a silence, a shrug and a suppressed sigh, the loneliness of an intellectual man. He told himself that he was not one of those lucky men who win in their wife an intellectual mate and an inspiration. No, if she preferred to linger with the common herd, he must travel forward alone. (That is the trouble about a wife. She is the nearest ambassador of that outside world which so often strikes us as rather pitiable, in its ignorance and limitations; and it is to her therefore that we must address our annoyance at its condition; it is through her alone that we can give it "a piece of our mind." She is the whipping-boy for the world.)

The Five Modern Masters were, needless to say, Mr. Galsworthy, Mr. Bennett, Mr. Chesterton, Mr. Shaw, and Mr. Wells. The first three were nothing very disruptive; but Mr. Gallimore was never the same man



after hearing the two lectures on Mr. Shaw and Mr. Wells. Not that the lecturer was provocative, because University Extension lecturers are seldom allowed to disturb anyone's prejudices, but unfortunately Mr. Gallimore, humiliated to think that he had read nothing of these famous men, set out with all a convert's zeal to study them exhaustively. Now, so far, his reading had only lengthened the distances along which his intellect could travel—advancing the permanent way, as it were, and throwing out a branch line here and there; it had not torn up the rails, overthrown the viaducts, dynamited the cuttings, and compelled him to build a whole new system of thought; but this was just the mischief those two wreckers, Mr. Shaw and Mr. Wells, set about performing.

After reading Mr. Shaw he believed that marriage as practised in England was an absurdity; that most parents in the disciplining of their children were libidinous bullies; that priests, bankers, solicitors and doctors (especially doctors) were, each in their organized bands, a secret conspiracy for the spoliation of mankind; and that a vaccination mark on your left arm was as good as the brand of a cowardly and cozened fool. It never occurred to him that Mr. Shaw might be rather violently trumpeting the reverse side of a question, simply because he was vexed that people should have forgotten the existence of that verso; or that if some one were to push up Mr. Shaw's coat- and shirt-sleeves as far as the shoulder—supposing a man were found presumptuous enough to do this thing, or a woman—we might all be able to point with some delight to two or three little pock-marked scars.

And all those whom Mr. Shaw had not slain (either by an oversight, or because Mr. Gallimore had not read the whole of his output) were quickly executed by Mr. Wells. The public schoolmasters, the University Dons, the kings, the flag-waving patriots, the diplomats, the Foreign Office—all were condemned as encumbrances on the march of civilization and guillotined by this one-man



revolution. Mr. Gallimore was convinced. He was convinced by these brilliant and lucid writers, and more than ever sorry for his wife.

He would lay down his books on the dining-room table, and walk up and down to think over them. He would think with dismay how, right up to his sixty-first year, he had been a church-goer, a chapel-goer, a Conservative and a patriot—aye, and not disinclined to argue in some heat against those who held less loyal views—and good God! he had been on the wrong side all the time! He had been one of the poor, limited, timid, purblind conventionalists. He had been numbered amongst those whom the Intellectuals ridiculed. “Well, I thank God I have awakened, even at this late hour.”

## II

He felt that his conversion from Toryism, imperialism, militarism, and church-going was a matter not un-momentous, and began to examine with satisfaction the dramatic movements it would require. His resignation from the Congregational Chapel—he would effect that quietly, because it was not his nature to hurt the weaker brethren; he would just hint to the authorities that he had long been feeling very critical of organized religion and must have his complete spiritual freedom. It would do good. These people ought to realize that the best minds were leaving them. Then there would be his translation from the Tory Party to the Labour Party in Bealing. This should make an agreeable little clatter; he who had been for forty years a member of the local Conservative branch, and at one time its honorary treasurer! There would be a fluttering in the political dove-cotes of Bealing, not unlike that which always accompanied the translations of Mr. Winston Churchill.

The very next morning he took hat and cane and set off for the Labour Party's Office in Church Street. It was a shop with a plate-glass window that had once been

the proud installation of a small draper. He knew the place well, having often in what we may call the darkness of his middle ages, looked at its display of posters and leaflets with a mixture of anger, contempt, and fear—anger at this open exhortation to robbery; contempt for the wretched have-nots and poor criminal types who were gulled by it; and fear lest it carried the day in his lifetime.

Pushing open the door—and there was drama in the action—he stood on the bare boards of the office and looked at a young clerk who sat behind a deal table, tilting back his chair and picking his teeth. The young man was most offensively like what Mr. Gallimore considered a Labourite to be.

“Is there anyone I can see?” asked Mr. Gallimore, with, despite himself, a hint of unsocialistic hauteur.

“No one in except me.”

“Oh—that’s a pity.”

“No; there’s no one in except me,” repeated the youth, without stopping the salvage in his mouth.

Mr. Gallimore was conscious of a first rebuff.

“K’n’igh do anything for you?” proceeded the youth, having reflected on the visitor over his tooth-pick.

No “sirs” from this young man; no rising from his chair! Typical of the little pretentious upstarts that Socialism produced!

“I hardly think so. The truth is, I wanted to attach myself to the local branch of the Labour Party. Hitherto I have always——”

“Oh, if that’s all . . .”

*All!* Mr. Gallimore’s temper began to move. But the young man, unaware of the coming trouble, brought his chair down to all-fours and took some papers from a rack. “Here. You have to fill in these, and send them to the Sec.”

“No, no,” protested Mr. Gallimore. “I shall need to talk over this step with some authoritative person before I join. It isn’t a step one takes lightly.”



"Want some information?" The youth began to make a selection from the lurid pamphlets and leaflets. "Better study these."

"*Study those?*" began Mr. Gallimore, dangerously.

"Yes, they'll put you wise. 'Ere. 'Socialism in a Nutshell.' 'Socialism and the Man in the Street.' You couldn't want anything put simpler."

"Put simpler!" repeated Mr. Gallimore, nodding dangerously.

"Yes, you couldn't want anything simpler. Here's another rather longer, but it's quite as easy, 'Socialism for the Common Man.' It's a good one, that."

"God in Heaven!" exclaimed Mr. Gallimore, who remembered that Shakespeare often used a very plain, homespun English for his vituperative passages. "I should hope I had studied something better than all those blatant lies. Do you think I'm one of the fools that are taken in by *them*? Do I look the sort? You can keep your—— keep your—— for its proper purposes"; and he recommended a use to which the young man might put his leaflets, and walked out, hot and unhappy.

## CHAPTER III

### *And Stephen*

#### I

**I**N these early months of 1914 the secret thoughts of Stephen were given point and sting by the approach of his thirtieth birthday. To such as Stephen his thirtieth birthday is apt to come suddenly, and with rebuke and menace on its face. "What!" it says. "Nothing done with your life yet? And if you have done nothing by thirty, will you do anything after?"

Let us accompany Stephen in the train one evening in March, 1914. Let us join him, say, at Gloucester Road Station, and travel to Bealing, eavesdropping on his thoughts. He is standing suspended by the right hand from a loop of leather; "straphanging," as they have called it since the day the long tram-like compartments of the electrified line superseded the old coaches of the steam train. His carriage is crowded, but there is room for us, and a seat, because we sit in his brain and watch the crowding, jostling, straphanging thoughts—their entrance, their stay, and their departure. Some are patient, some are irritable, and most are tired.

"Thirty." Stephen is weary after his day's work, and that is why his thoughts are at their darkest. Thirty; and he is still a drudge of Leicester's! Three pounds a week. Nothing has happened to lift him suddenly to prosperity or distinction. Why should it? But as long as he was in the twenties he hoped that something undefined might happen: there seemed such quantities of time. He had contented himself with these vague hopes, letting Thursday follow Wednesday, and Friday Thurs-



day, till thirteen years had passed. Thirteen years ! It was proof that he would do nothing.

"Earl's Court," shouted the conductor ; and Stephen was pushed by the people as they hurried to the doors.

He was quite satisfied that, given the same opportunities and the same good fortune, he could have achieved anything that Edison, or Northcliffe, or W. J. Locke, or Beerbohm Tree had achieved. It was not flabbiness of character that had inhibited his successes, but bad luck and his folly in having scruples. If he hadn't led an ascetic life he would never have been driven by his needs to marry Florrie ; and then, unencumbered by a wife and a little daughter, he would not have minded changing his certain three pounds a week for the precarious earnings of some such profession as journalism or the stage, where there was at least the chance of distinction and high rewards. But this he had refused to do for Florrie's and little Ruth's sake. Or again : if he had not married Florrie rather than see her suffer, he might have married some one comparatively wealthy and so been able to start himself successfully—had not Miss Magnus, at Sennen, hinted this ?

"West Kensington."

What, already ? Poor Florrie ! (The train was moving again.) Had he any love left for her ? Could you be said to love a person when every recollection of her was dogged by a grey ghost of a thought : "If I hadn't been such a fool as to marry her ! . . ." Could you feel affection for a wife whom you were persuaded was ignorant and common ; whose relatives you despised so that you dared not think of them ; whose good looks (her only asset) had no more appeal to you, now that you lived with them and saw how poor they could show, in disarray ? Yes, a sort of affection, but nothing more ; they had been through so much together, and she was little Ruth's mother. . . . And thank God, his chivalry had saved him from ever being rude or unkind to her, and had

insisted that he concealed the failure of his love. . . .  
Never should she know of that, if he could help it. . . .

But if he could undo it all and be free, would he not ?  
Would he not ? Rather ! A happy glow from that  
imagined freedom touched him ; and he saw a beautiful,  
well-bred gracious girl coming towards him as a wife,  
so different.

“ Baron’s Court.”

Was Florrie happy ? Or did she suspect every thought  
of her silent husband ? No, she was fairly happy, even  
if she hid a disappointment somewhere. Her little  
daughter was an unending joy to her ; she was childishly  
proud of her few rooms, for ever adding some new  
decoration ; and into her affection for himself she had  
introduced a smiling patience. Had she learned this  
trick from his mother ? Had his mother advised her to  
it ? Of what was she always talking to Florrie, and what  
was the justification for Florrie’s amazing love for her  
mother-in-law ?

“ I suppose Mother’s really rather a wonderful person.”  
How she had come and saved everything from shipwreck  
when little Ruth was born ! Florrie and he had been  
frightened lest the lodgers were all lost, with no one to  
do the work of the house ; and then Mother knocking at  
the front door ! “ Don’t worry, my dears. Now that  
there is only Mr. Gallimore to look after, I can easily  
be here by ten in the morning and stay with you most  
of the day—just nip back about five for a few minutes to  
put the supper on.” And at ten each morning the little  
active woman had arrived, blown and untidy, but ready  
to do all the work of No. 17. . . .

“ Hammersmith.”

Stephen won to a seat.

And this work she had done for a month before Ruth’s  
appearance, and with lessening regularity for ten months  
after, because, as she said, the milk that Florrie gave to  
Ruth mustn’t be thinned by too much labour. Extra-



ordinarily crude in her language, Mother was, sometimes. And not once in all those eleven months had the steam of his father's supper failed to rise in 33 Waldron Avenue, a few minutes before his feet were heard on the doorstep. Over two altars did this little, thin, untidy priestess raise her cloud of steam. Her son, as he thought of it, caught a reflection of his mother's happiness. "I wonder if she is the only happy one of us all. If she is, thank God she's teaching her secrets to Florrie."

He wanted Florrie to be happy—happy in spite of him. This certainty that he sought her happiness turned Stephen's eyes on kindlier aspects of his own character. Was there not something of his mother in him, and could he not develop it? After all, he had charged in and rescued a drunkard's daughter and made her a home of which she was proud. And the fact that she was simple and ignorant and rather common, could he not, since this appealed to his protection, make it a spring of pleasure more than of pain? Could he not? Once he had defended before his mother the action of a man who had gone off to live his own life with the woman he loved, leaving a kindly letter for his wife and the request that she would sometimes let him see his children. He had defended this man, because he had sometimes wondered if he could do the same. Was there not, he had asked, something almost fine in defying the tyrannical conventions of the world for the sake of a full, complete life? But his mother had shaken her head and said: "No, there are happier things in life than one's own happiness."

The sentence had struck and rooted in his mind. He endorsed it now: "Yes, there are happier things in life than one's own beastly happiness. I have nothing that I wanted, but Florrie has quite a little that she wanted. That is good, and it makes me happy. . . ."

You perceive what was toward. Realism was advancing a little salient into Stephen's entrenched, but failing, dreams; and I dare say that, even if all the might of his

## THE OLD TREE BLOSSOMED

Gallimore soul had risen like a nation in arms against such a strange threat, realism would have conquered ; but the Serajevo bomb exploded in its rear, dispersing its attack, and the most of Stephen's dreams marched forward to fulfilment.

### II

War. It has no validity in reason : what is its strange and awful validity of beauty ? War came ; and Stephen's heart opened to it, in an irrational, suppressed, but rioting welcome, like some cramped thing opening to receive pleasures and inflations unbelievable. Here was one who disliked to inflict pain ; who had but little room in him for hate or vengeance ; who saw dimly the hardships, the filth, and the general degradation and inhumanity that were coming ; and yet his response to this sudden fact of War was the response of most of us—a response of thrilled emotion, an æsthetic delight, a self-yielding to some dark allurements more powerful than reason and contemptuous of expediency. Where such emotion is stirred, there is beauty. War : one of the smallest, it is perhaps the most terribly beautiful of words. Writers, if they cannot run to War as a fact, would rather write about it than about any other thing, even though in indignation. They, and we, are fascinated, if only by its horrors.

One reason would my light tale suggest : that as long as we cramp an adventurous, restless and dreaming people in Leicester's, in Waldron Avenue, and in English Road, we may address our unanswerable arguments to our reason and to our self-interest, and still this instant emotional answer will lurk in the sanest of us, ready and eager to spring. "Go where there are horses." "It is wonderful to be going steadily west, Stephen." Whatever else these and a thousand other wistful words may mean, they mean most certainly War.



## CHAPTER IV

*Two in August, 1914*

### I

THE pressure of joy in Stephen was the instant effect of the idea's touch. Like a finger on a button, the idea touched him, and an electric excitement went tingling along his veins. It was the luncheon hour—one of those rumour-filled, voluble, febrific luncheon hours in the first fortnight of war—and Stephen, never talkative and often solitary, stood on the pavement watching a bill-sticker as he splashed on to a hoarding, with marvellous manhandling of brush, bucket and ladder, a huge advertisement. "Lord Kitch—" said the first oblong slip, under the swashing brush. What about Lord Kitchener? Lord Kitchener was the "Man of the Hour"; the *Daily Mail* had proclaimed it, and had sat him in command at the War Office, while the Prime Minister wisely gave his consent. "—ener wants—" slap and sweep of the brush; and *that* was pasted home. Now another long slip sailing into the breeze and mischievously trying to misbehave, but powerless in the hands of its master: "100,000 men." Slap, splash and sweep—a wide sweep over the whole advertisement, and the artist was descending his ladder. Stephen could now read the advertisement continuously:

"Lord Kitchener wants 100,000 men. Terms of enlistment: For three years or the duration of the war. GOD SAVE THE KING."

"He only wants ninety-nine thousand nine hundred and ninety-nine," said Stephen, "because he's got *one* here."

Not till this moment had it occurred to him that his part in the sudden war would be anything but an interested reading at home of its progress. True, a boisterous journalist in last Sunday's paper had called on the Government to drill and arm every able-bodied man in the three kingdoms, and simultaneously to raise the black millions of the Empire in Africa and the East. But Stephen had laughed, calling it rhetoric at a penny the line. Now, as he determined to be one of that hundred thousand, there broke upon him all that it would mean. Escape from the clerk's stool to a horse's back! Opportunity, single and unrepeatable, for distinction and fame! "And by heaven! I'll either be killed or go just as far as the opportunity permits. I'll slave at this as I've never slaved at Leicester's. I'll join at once, slave for my stripes, and then if the war goes on, I shall almost certainly get a commission. Captain Gallimore. Major Gallimore. Supposing I got a battalion! *Colonel Gallimore.*" His hopes trod on one another's heels so pushfully that at last he was seeing himself as a trusted staff officer of the Commander-in-Chief, poring with him over a strategic map, and pointing out, by virtue of something not less than inborn military genius, the exact point of attack. He was not conscious of any nobility or self-sacrifice in thus going to the wars; such things seemed the opposite of the war's gift to him; for he saw only the opportunity.

Hardly could he write that afternoon, so petty seemed Leicester's correspondence. By all the powers above! how had he given thirteen years of his life to the picking of such rags?

## II

It was unfortunate that Mr. Gallimore, in the vigil hours of a World War, should have pursued his political studies to the very extremes of international Socialism and anti-militarism. He had learnt from his books, with surprise and resistance at first, and then with a con-



viction that impelled him to wordy and somewhat heated expositions before his wife, how patriotism at its best was only selfishness extended outwards till it covered one's community, and at its worst, the most insolent, reckless, murderous thing in the world ; how Imperialism was in the same category as shoplifting and avarice ; how national flags and emblems were only the latter-day developments of the tribal gods of savage races ; and how the gaudy uniforms of soldiers and sailors could not conceal from intelligent men that their wearers were the salaried assassins of Europe's bandit chiefs. The fluency and force of his arguments to his wife had decided him that they ought to be given more permanent form, and he had made them up into an article, "The Fallacy of War," which he sent to a Socialist periodical. So long did they retain it that Mr. Gallimore was quite consoled for its ultimate return by the certainty that they must have deliberated long before bringing themselves to reject it.

Despite that first indecisive encounter at the office of the Labour Party, he had eventually joined the Bealing Branch, on the introduction of a friend. It had not been quite so spectacular an entry as he had desired, but it was better than the servant's door which the little whipster at the office had held open for him. He had at least been presented to the Comrades at a meeting and earned a fine round of applause. The average age of the assembled comrades had been rather a shock to him that night ; he had figured it at about twenty-four, but at any rate there were one or two nearly as old as he. That had been three months ago ; and since then there had been a dramatic secession from the Bealing Labour Party of the whole body of extremer members, who had organized themselves into a junto calling itself "The Socialist Group." Mr. Gallimore, who had now decided that he was on the Side of Youth, had gone with them, thus winning a popularity among these youngsters that was one of the pleasantest things he had known. He



had little doubt that they would elect him to their committee, and he longed for them to do so, as eagerly as any wire-pulling Parliamentarian for the responsibilities of office. The Secretaryship, even, dangled attractively before his eyes. Who knew, he might one day become recognized as their leader? To this end he made it his duty to be heard at every meeting. By efforts not unheroic, he would overthrow a congenital nervousness, rise from his seat, clear his throat, and offer an opinion, however short, to Mr. Chairman. If matter for such an interposition failed him, he would appeal on a point of order. Ground-baiting like this has never yet failed to draw office to your hook, and he was soon a committeeman. In July he was offered the Secretaryship, and accepted it, after a graceful protestation that there were many more suitable and younger men. Denials greeted this, and acclamation his appointment.

Then Germany threatened Europe with war. Mr. Gallimore was ashamed at the inner delight with which he viewed France's stern preparations to defend herself, and Mr. Churchill's quiet dismissal of the British Navy to its war stations. And when Germany declared war on Russia, and France put herself beside her eastern ally, his heart, so little was it disciplined by his head, throbbed with exultation. He coughed, and tried to pull himself together; he tried to remember all that he had read about the childishness and fetichism of national flags. But when Germany demanded a passage for her armies through Belgium, and Belgium—great little Belgium!—slammed her gates in the bully's face—he, well, he could have cheered louder than all the rest, had he not been Secretary of the Socialist Group. And when England, rather than see Belgium violated, proclaimed a state of war as between herself and Germany; and when the Prime Minister declared to a hushed house that he would not sheathe the sword, I tell you, no man went hotter and colder with exquisite appreciation, with pride and



delight, than Mr. Gallimore. Worse still, the very next morning, as he walked the crowded streets and saw a hairdresser hauling a Union Jack up his parti-coloured pole till it broke to the breeze, he let loose the cheer he had bottled so long.

In a word, there was war in Mr. Gallimore's members. The Armies of the Allies, let me put it, had marched into that kingdom and occupied his heart, his reins, his bowels of pity—yea, every part of him, except one little corner of his brain where sat the Socialist government he had placed in power.

Not a word about his feelings dared he utter to his comrades. At the meeting specially convened to denounce the war he listened in silence and drew figures on the blotting-pad provided for the Secretary. A Union Jack is an easy figure to outline, and at one stage he was unconsciously drawing one.

At last he determined that he must pull his wits together and organize against this reactionary revolution a counter-revolution: no, he would not be driven off his head by the militarist, capitalist Press; he would not look at their papers—he would put them on the Index; he would read only those journals that would stabilize his pacifist faith. “I am not strong enough”—he admitted so much to himself—“I am not strong enough to read both sides.” And for a little while he kept to this ascetic way of life: not only did he withhold himself from all traffic with the patriotic papers, but he even turned his eyes away from their bright placards, which tempted him, like harlots, with their bold staring at every street corner. Even thus did the anchorites lower their eyes if they passed a woman, and invoke with lively prayers the aid of all the saints.

But the eye is an insubordinate member; a gateway that will swing of its own accord when concupiscence seeks an entry; and one morning Mr. Gallimore cast an excessively concupiscent eye on the placard of the *Daily*

*Post*, "WHY WE SHALL WIN." It thrilled him; he paused; he was most anxious to learn any reasons why we should win. Then he resolutely passed the shop. But the farther he went from the newsagent's the nearer he came to the Public Reading Room, and at the entrance to the Public Reading Room he yielded incontinently and walked straight in. And within he read not only that article in the *Daily Post*, but every paper in the place that had any favourable news of the war; he enjoyed a whole morning of debauchery.

And to those leading articles, with their call upon all loyal citizens to lay every ounce of their ability at the disposal of their hard-pressed country, his whole being cried assent; he decided that he would have to be convinced; he read greedily on, thinking frequently and with pleasure, "I am being convinced." After two columns of the *Daily Telegraph* he declared, "Yes, I am convinced." And as this glorious certainty possessed him, he felt like a man who has been fettered at every point bursting his bonds; more than that, like a man who has been dead coming to radiant life again.

"We *couldn't* have left Belgium alone. We must have come in on her side. Yes, I am quite convinced now. I don't care what all these little unlicked upstarts say. I am going to declare my faith. If necessary, I shall not hesitate to resign. . . . Of course, I shall resign."

This thought pleased him; he loved resignations.

### III

The same evening came Stephen to Waldron Avenue, airing a cheap blue-serge uniform—consisting of blue slacks, tight blue tunic, and a blue cap like a convict's—which was all that the Government, for the present, could issue to its thronging recruits.

"Behold Private Gallimore, and no convict," announced he in the hall to his mother. "Private Gallimore, attached to the 34th Middlesex."



"Stephen!"

In the dining-room Mr. Gallimore, who had lowered his *Evening News* directly the bell rang, and had cocked up a straining ear as his wife passed from the kitchen to the hall-door, instantly flung the paper down and jumped up. He hurried into the passage. There was his son grinning like a shy child, in the ugliest uniform ever devised by the wit of man.

"Sorry, Father," apologized he. "I know you won't approve. But if I'd stayed behind, I should have burst."

"Of course you would," agreed his father. "I'd have been ashamed of you if you hadn't."

He extended his hand, feeling much like a Roman father.

"I congratulate you, Stephen. And we're proud of you, aren't we, Ruth?"

Stephen took the hand, blushed, and looked uncomfortable: it seemed unnatural, a father shaking his son's hand.

"There's nothing to be proud of yet," said he. "But my hat! I'm going to try to—it won't be for want of trying if I don't do something worth making a song about——"

"Of course you will, of course you will——" stuttered his father.

"Stephen," murmured his mother, "you—you won't be rash? What—what will Florrie and little Ruth do, if you—if you get killed?"

"What will they do? Have something to be proud of, for a change. Do you know, I've often worried that my daughter would have no reason to be proud of her father. I've never said this before, but——"

"I knew you'd do it," broke in Mr. Gallimore. "Gad, I knew you'd do it. It's in our blood. This sort of thing's in our blood. And I shall be very surprised if Stephen doesn't show it by doing something big. Dammit, he looks like a staff officer, even in that infernal

kit. And to-morrow I shall offer my services for what they are worth. I ought to be able to be a War Office clerk or something, with forty-five years' training. I shall try to pull my weight, too."

"But I thought you didn't approve of fighting, Father, even if the cause is good."

"I don't care whether I approve or not," exclaimed Mr. Gallimore with bright eyes. "I'm only glad you've done it, and to-morrow I shall offer my own services—whether I approve or not."

## IV

With nervousness and eagerness mingled he awaited the next meeting of the Socialist Group. He had not to wait long. The Group was engaged in much meeting just now. They had to do something in these galvanized days, and as their creed would not allow them to enlist, or cheer others who had enlisted, they met. It is probable that every one of their minds, which they imagined so coldly realistic, was as romantic as their Secretary's, and that they saw themselves in the likeness of a Committee of Public Safety or a Jacobin Club. Mr. Gallimore walked to their meeting, his nervousness, since he was on the brink of public speech, and his eagerness, since he was about to drop a bombshell, heightened to a vibrating pitch. The meeting was held in the large upper room of a cheap eating-house, and as he entered and walked with feigned ease to his place on the Chairman's right, he saw that it was as crowded, in its smaller scale, as the House of Commons on a Budget Day. It seemed he was late and they were only waiting his arrival, for the Chairman, a fat grocer, immediately got up and said, "Well, now what abaht startin'?" which drew the committee members to their seats at the table. The rest found what chairs they could, or sat on the floor.

They were to discuss further, submitted the Chairman, their attitude, their personal attitude, if he might so put



it, to this here war. Here was this latest call for volunteers, and this campaign of victimization of all those who had the courage to stand against the stream, and this here trick of handing white feathers to all those who weren't in uniform, and what with one thing and another, and talk of conscription later on, they would have to see how they could support and strengthen one another. Perhaps some one would offer his considerations.

He sat down, and a modest silence filled the room. The clearing of Mr. Gallimore's throat was the first sound. It is a quality of stage fright that one prefers the dreaded pain of public utterance to a continuing of internal disorganization. Mr. Gallimore rose and began.

"Perhaps, Mr. Chairman, I had better make my position clear at the outset. *Chrr'mm, chr'mm*. I regret to say that after deep thought I no longer find myself in harmony with you. I—yes, I find myself approving of this war."

There were murmurs of protest and disbelief.

"Yes, I am sorry to say I do. I—*chrr-mm, chr'mm*—I feel I shall be compelled to do all I can to support it."

Came cries of "Why? Why?"

"*Why?*" Mr. Gallimore echoed "Why" as indignantly as a man who is about to say, "I'll soon tell you why," but unfortunately he discovered that, now the occasion demanded it, he could not remember his reasons why.

"I thought you were an Internationalist," objected a youth, who was sitting tailor-wise on the floor; and Mr. Gallimore was pricked with offence, but less at the youth's remark than at his age.

"I may be an Internationalist—I *am* an Internationalist, but I'm an Englishman first."

Roars of laughter welcomed this, and Mr. Gallimore, who in his heat and confusion, had thought it rather a fine remark, instantly saw its absurdity. The laugh rolled on, sometimes appearing ready to stop and then

changing its mind and continuing, as the assembly saw further facets of humour in the unfortunate remark. Sweat broke on the speaker's brow.

"What shall you do, then?" demanded another impudent young man, who, as was obvious from his anxiety to get out his remark, felt he was about to be humorous. "Join the army?"

"No, sir, I should have thought it was plain that I was too old to join the army, and too stout—just as you're too young and undeveloped. But I'm very glad to say my boy has this day joined the colours."

"The colours! Colours, mark you! He's been reading G. A. Henty."

The chairman rapped the table.

"Come, come—we don't wish no rudeness. Order, Mr. Lemper. We don't wish no rudeness."

But Mr. Gallimore, who did wish rudeness—at any rate, until he had got in his reply to Mr. Lemper—snapped:

"Yes, sir. *Colours*. It's a funny word, isn't it? But I happen not to be ashamed of it, any more than you're ashamed when you sing all your damned nonsense about your Red Flag; and I don't mind telling you that I'm proud of my son in a way your father will never have a chance of being proud of you."

"'Ere . . . please . . ." begged the Chairman.

"Well, one good turn deserves another," grumbled Mr. Gallimore.

"But supposing, Gallimore," put in an older and soberer man, "they kill your boy between them, what then?"

"What then? . . ." Mr. Gallimore paused. "I shall try to be still prouder, sir."

A silence, broken by a jester's murmur, "We've come to the Conservative Club by mistake, I think."

"Who's been getting hold of you, Gallimore?" tried another and friendlier member.



"No one's been getting hold of me. I flatter myself I'm not the sort of person that's got hold of. I think these things out for myself."

Now a committee-man half rose, so that he was in that peculiarly ridiculous position which, since it is neither sitting nor standing, but an arrested half-way between the two, requires the support of the table if it is to be sustained.

"But isn't our comrade letting his emotion run away with his reason?"

And having delivered this sentence which he had been chiselling into its final form for some minutes, he released his body from the arrested position and sat down.

"No, sir, I think not," answered Mr. Gallimore, who really thought it an exact description of his case.

Another member half rose, using the back of his chair to support the unnatural position.

"You're not one of those, are you, who says 'My country, right or wrong'?"

In response to this Mr. Gallimore turned his gaze inward upon his mental condition, but being quite unable to see any road through that tangled undergrowth, said suddenly:

"Yes, dammit, I am! I am, till this job's over."

A louder laugh than before was his reward, and he wiped his brow. Next rose a tall, broad-shouldered man, and he stood so completely and so finally that it became evident he intended to make a considerable speech. All eyes turned towards him, and Mr. Gallimore sat down, overawed by this deliberate stance. The character of this speaker's observations, which were long, Mr. Gallimore never knew, for he resented being lectured by such a fellow, not because of the arguments he advanced but because of the aspirates he omitted; and he devoted the time to a disinterment, for use in his reply, of the arguments that had convinced him when he was reading the patriotic newspapers; and so, when the

speaker sat himself down, he was primed with an offering for the audience.

"What's the good of lecturing me like this?" demanded he, rising to his feet. "It is because I hate war more than any of you that I'm prepared to fight for my faith. I believe that this is a war to end war."

Thus he sounded the fine phrase which in those days, my children, enabled all of us anti-militarists to have our cake and eat it. It was greeted on this far-away night with as noisy a ridicule as any it has endured since, and Mr. Gallimore, who had stood to deliver it, angrily pushed back his chair.

"I beg you will accept my resignation. Both from my office and the Society. I came prepared for this."

Bursting open his attaché case, he drew out the Secretary's books and tossed them on the table, feeling the while rather like Cromwell, or some one else, who tossed down the symbols of office.

"I think you will find everything in order. I shall send a report of my action to the local press, and am ready to accept the verdict of my countrymen. . . . Oh, laugh if you like. . . . And now since I have no further place in your councils, I had better take my leave. Good evening, gentlemen." And he walked out, fancying he resembled a whole political party walking out of the House of Commons.



## CHAPTER V

### *Two Uniforms and their Effects*

#### I

AND now it pleases me to tell you that Mr. Gallimore's defection from the Socialist Group was almost as bright a local sensation as his happiest dreams depicted. I am glad that once in his life, to use an unworthy phrase, he "brought it off." He wrote a long letter containing an outline of his spiritual state and the record of his resignation, and sent it to the *Bealing Weekly Gazetteer*, which, since it was as mad in these days as anyone else, published it under the headings, "PROMINENT SOCIALIST AND THE WAR, His Decisive Step, Letter from Mr. Robert Gallimore." And the next week there were four letters patting the Socialist secretary on the back; and the week after that, there were two more; and the third week yet another, though this was a very little one and had sunk like a dissolving sweetmeat to the bottom of the column. That was all; he opened his paper each Wednesday for a month afterwards, and turned straight to "Our Post Bag," always with a beating hope, and always destined to the little ache of disappointment. Still, he had had his day; and now when he walked in the High Street he could imagine the nimbus of notoriety about him.

He joined the National Guard and the Special Constabulary. I wish you could have seen him forming fours on Bealing Green in the grey uniform of the National Guard; it emphasized, perhaps, his outward slope from breast to belt in a way that a loose jacket happily curtains, but in respect to the adjustment of his

puttees and the polish of his buttons, it yielded nothing to any sergeant-major's in the fourteen armies.

But he preferred the quiet perambulations of a Special Constable to these sweating, marching, hopping movements in the National Guard. Then in the night watches he would walk his beat, either alone or with his partner, not a little pleased with his guardianship of all these un-uniformed people sleeping behind the blinded house-fronts, and determined to do his duty bravely should any evil threaten them. What form that evil might take was no clearer to him than many another figment of his mind, but he was there on the pavement to take it in custody. And much unrecognized joy it gave him to detect through the fanlight of a door, or under the blind of an upstairs window, enough illegal light to justify his knocking up the householder and drawing his attention to the misdemeanour. It was extraordinarily gratifying to stand in his uniform on the guilty step, with all the might of Government and Law and the Defence of the Realm Act behind him; and when the peeping, pyjama'd householder appeared, to apologize for this disturbance with all the traditional courtesy of the policeman. He caressed in secret an ambition to be the first to discover some traitor signalling from an attic window to the enemy aircraft overhead. "Smartness of a Special"—he could fancy the headline. Once he believed he had done it, and stood from 2 to 3 a.m. watching a suspicious twinkle behind the blind of a dormer window. But he decided with disappointment that it was not bright enough, and walked on. It was probably the night-breeze trembling the blind of a sick-room.

His greatest moments were when the air-raiders really came to London. Then, since they were not more than six miles east of Bealing he had the joyous task of knocking up all the houses on his beat and bidding the occupants take refuge in their cellars; and when all his people had been warned and safely sheltered, he stood on the pave-



ment in the full danger outside, listening to the distant *boom-boom* of the anti-aircraft guns, and dealing very severely with any unauthorized person who ventured into such an exposed position. On the sound of the "All Clear," blown by equally delighted boy-scouts on bicycles, he retired from the firing-line and commanded his charges to rise from their cellars.

This was, I imagine, the nearest our Mr. Gallimore ever got to the fine thrills his forefather knew—that Robert of Miraval, the fighting troubadour, who led his Provençal knighthood into battle, chaunting his songs in front of them and striking the first blow.

## II

It cannot be stated too often that this is a book of secret history, one of those pasticcios of scandalous revelations that are so popular to-day. I am offering to the public a frank description of things that had much better have been kept private. My desire is simply to make some money out of the sufferings of a good-natured, rather foolish old man ; of his son, Stephen ; and of others in his circle, who, though they have done me no hurt, have revealed to me characters that lend themselves to marketing. It is a pity, because I am fond of Mr. Gallimore, and nothing but a temporary financial embarrassment could have compelled me to sell his most private thoughts. It is the same with Stephen. I am not only fond of him, but I like and admire much that I see in his character, and I would far rather have given you the outward incidents of his career from lowly private to distinguished officer—in fact, I shall certainly introduce some of this, not just because it is a fine story, but because it will enable me to disclose the official secrets of one very interesting corner of the war—but my main business now is with some of his less honourable conduct—and that, of course, means his relations with his wife. I shall show you the sad effect of a uniform on conjugal

happiness. I might have sold you Florrie's pain, but I decided not to for the simple reason that I did not think it would sell so well. You see, Florrie is really rather a dear. I know all about her inner thoughts just as I do about her husband's, and I know that, for my present purpose, far too many of them are quiet, amiable thoughts. A few of them are beautiful ; and they are those which she drew from Mrs. Gallimore.

Have you noticed that I have told you mainly of Mrs. Gallimore's words and deeds, seldom taking you into the secret places of her mind ? Can you doubt why ? Think not that it is because I can't see my way there so clearly. I assure you I have known her littlest thoughts about everything here recorded. But the fact is, there are a placidity and a wisdom in the chambers of her heart which would be edifying to describe, but are not, as the play-producers say, a commercial proposition. Also it is possible that my muse has some fragments of shame left in her, and pirouettes hurriedly out of these places, like a dancing girl in a scanty and scandalous costume who has unwittingly happened upon family prayers.

So now to Stephen and Florrie. As long as Stephen was only a sergeant—and having enlisted in the first days of the war, he was made a sergeant almost directly—he and Florrie were happier than they had been since marriage. His long absences made his coming on leave an anticipated delight, and she was properly proud of his uniform and his stripes. But after he had been a sergeant for a few months, two things became manifest to him : one, that the war was going on for years, and the other, that he must soon be given a commission. I tell you the eager certainty of this advance was wine in his veins. The advance came. His C.O. summoned him to the Orderly Room and told him that he had been asked to recommend certain N.C.O.'s for commissioned rank, and if Stephen liked, he would send his name forward.



## TWO UNIFORMS AND THEIR EFFECTS

Stephen thanked the Colonel ; he was only impatient to get out of the hut and wire the news to Florrie.

### III

And the wire lit a *feu de joie* in the mistress of 17 English Road. Florrie, quite unaware that here her tragedy began, was only eager to speak of Stephen's promotion to all her friends, even the tradesmen of her doorstep who, I am ashamed to say, were among the chiefest of her friends. The wire arrived at tea-time, and Florrie seized hat and mackintosh and hurried through the rain, with little short quick steps, to 33 Waldron Avenue, that the old Gallimore couple might share her joy. Impatience would not allow her to stay there long ; it impelled her to hurry, with the same quick short steps to her mother's home in Fulham Road.

Here Mr. Tom Bowden, delighted that his daughter should have risen so far above him, at once left her with her mother and sought the Bishop's Arms, where he lifted his glass to his friends, saying, " My young son-in-law has got his commission. Here's to it." He found it difficult to leave the place as long as any of its habitués were without this information, and it was only the War-time Closing Regulations that sent him home while he could still see that uneasy borderland where the pedestrians cease and the vehicles begin.

Florrie was not subtle enough to foresee in this hour the effect on Stephen of an officer's uniform ; of an Officers' Mess where deferential orderlies sped to his summons ; of an officer's first-class travelling ; of an officer's personal servant ; of all the London clubs of which an officer was an honorary member ; and of the ladies an officer might be expected to meet. She never foresaw Dorothea.

The first time he came on leave—and he purposely did not come till he had finished with the Officers' School and could appear in all the livery of a Second Lieutenant,

## THE OLD TREE BLOSSOMED

attached to the 9th Birminghams (Kitchener's)—he, to his own surprise and dismay, found himself taking dull blows of shame, as he looked at his narrow dingy hall, his tenth-rate living-room, his lodgers coming in and going out, and his wife hard-working in her scullery. He noticed the differences in her language and manner from those of the women he had recently met—and each little difference hurt him so much that, at length, her every word and action rasped his nerves. As was natural to him, he retired with this shame into himself. And he was conscious of nothing but relief and escape when the time came for his return to camp. Then he hugged his little daughter in a farewell almost passionate, pressing kisses on her cheeks and hair, as if by thus pouring out the fulness of his love as a father he might compensate for the failure of his love as a husband. And he kissed Florrie and patted her shoulders, hoping he had concealed his shameful thoughts. But Florrie felt that his embrace was forced and sorrowful, and long after his taxi had gone, she stood in her sitting-room, fiddling with her fingers and staring in front of her. She had begun to understand.





## CHAPTER VI

### *The Terrible Leave*

#### I

STEPHEN spent his next leave at Jim Harlowe's place in Sussex. Jim was his best friend in the 9th Birminghams ; a fellow-officer of D Company. Stephen and Jim were of an age, the other officers of the company, including the Captain and his second-in-command, being boys from Sandhurst and nearly ten years younger than they. Here was enough to throw any two young men together, in a sympathetic alliance against their juniors. Jim was the son of a banking house, and Stephen, in speech and appearance, lacked nothing that Jim possessed. They blent easily ; and when Jim suggested that they should spend their next short leave together at Woolands, his father's Sussex home, Stephen recalled the pains of his last return to English Road and accepted readily.

At Woolands he met Dorothea. But after that he tried to do his duty ; and when on their next leave Jim asked him to come again, reminding him with a wink that Dorothea would be there, Stephen, who guessed that Florrie had been hurt by his spending his last leave away from her, refused unhappily and took the train for Bealing. He must give this leave to Florrie.

That leave ! How can Fate be so cruel when you are but trying to do your duty ?

Gloom touched him as he mounted his steps and saw his blistered door ; it deepened as he stood in the narrow passage ; he took a stab as Florrie rushed out from her kitchen, untidy, and putting up a heated face to be kissed, while she laughingly spread her greasy hands away from

his uniform. He tried to embrace her affectionately, but knew at once that she had felt the remoteness and insincerity of his kiss. Turning, she walked quickly into her kitchen, and the view of her back, thus receding, raised his pity till it could have broken in tears.

He hastily followed her, with a parade of jocosity. But the little smoked kitchen, with the side-wall of the next house darkening the window, thrust at him brutally and silenced his jests. And Florrie was cutting onions into rings. This hurt him again, though he knew why she was doing it. In the old days he had been used to declare that a grilled steak garnished with onions was his favourite dish, so Florrie was preparing it as a tribute to his return. Promptly he clapped his hands with an exclamation of delight; but he felt like a clown trying to be funny while his child is dying.

"Where's little Ruth?"

"I've just sent her out to Mr. Maltby's for some milk. She's quite useful for running errands now."

Thrust and thrust again: his eight-year-old daughter "running errands"—what a phrase! and "*Mr. Maltby*" of the milkman!

At that moment the door was pushed open (like a slum door, he thought) and little Ruth came in, holding a jug. The jug was as naked and free from shame as Eve before the fall.

"Do you mean to say you go through the streets like that?"

The child stared; and there was a hint of uprising tears.

"That's all right, darling," he hastened to say. "Never mind, never mind."

But now the worrying idea was started: Florrie, though she were as anxious as any to "teach her child to be a lady," could never, never train her properly, knowing nothing but the deportment of the Fulham Road. And supper, the meal that was meant to be like a sacramental celebration, was only, to Stephen, a dozen illus-



trations of this horrid idea. Now Ruth was poking her fork at the table, and Florrie seemed either not to notice it or not to trouble about it. Now the child was taking a draught of water while her mouth was still occupied, and her mother did not correct her or observe it. Now she was sweeping round her teeth with her tongue, as one sweeps round a friendly room after a meal.

"Don't do that, Ruth darling! Isn't she ever corrected for this kind of thing, Florrie?"

"Yes, don't do that, Ruthie girl," endorsed her mother. "*Dirty!*"

("Dirty!" She had said it like a nursemaid.)

And then, alas, Ruth lifted up the excellent congealed gravy with the flat of her knife, like a gardener lifting a turf, and slid it on to her fork which was poised in air.

"Gracious Heavens!" exclaimed her father. "Look at her now!"

"Stop that, Ruthie," commanded her mother. "Stop it at once, I tell you! Give over now."

("Give over now!" Could you imagine such a phrase on the lips of Dorothea?)

"For pity's sake, Florrie, don't use expressions like that. It smacks of a housemaid."

"Yes, it does," agreed Florrie, "come to think of it."

("Come to think of it!" Was that any better?)

Ah well, no good nagging.

They were silent most of the evening, Florrie making a dress for Ruth, and he watching her. Once she scratched her head with the back of the needle, and he turned away his eyes, so did the natural little action hurt him.

In the bedroom, when he went up to it with her, he found flowers. Never before had she put flowers in their bedroom. He touched their petals, feeling as near to weeping as ever in his life. There came a sudden determination to take her in his arms, but he couldn't—he couldn't; his volition to do so was inhibited; a tourniquet of pain and pride was stopping the brain's order in

its flow to the limbs. He could only watch her, seeking for further torment. As she removed her dress he saw that her underclothes were coarse ; and there was now no justification for this, because she was receiving more money than ever before. Her vest, when it came into view, was darned—widely darned. “ She’s no real refinement,” he thought. “ Like all her class, she minds nothing but the garments which show.” His eyes falling on the occasional table by the bed’s side, he saw a pile of those magazines with which, in her lonely nights, she was accustomed to read herself to sleep : “ Polly’s Paper, Price 1d.,” “ Fanny’s Threepenny Fiction,” “ Our Girls’ Weekly Romances ” ; and Stephen, who of late had been reading the highest literature under an inspiration from one of the Birminghams’ officers, sighed miserably. But her nightdress touched him ; it was fresh and clean from the drawer, though, this being Saturday night, its predecessor should have endured for one day more. “ Poor child ! poor darling ! ” were his thoughts as he got into bed. Florrie, trying to be merry, turned off the light, jumped in beside him, and immediately put an arm about his neck to draw his face to hers. Sadly he kissed her, turned round, and pretended to sleep.

## II

But he was awake. He was staring at realities. Only this day had he seen Florrie for what she actually was : a completely common little daughter of the Fulham Road ; good, certainly, but that, such is the irrational build of the civilized mind, was impotent to heal his present wound ; he wanted, not goodness, but all that Dorothea was. In the old days of Leicester’s his life had been like a room in a dim light : he had not noticed its dirt and blemishes ; now in the sunlight thrown by Dorothea, he saw things exactly as they were. The revelation was intolerably complete ; he felt that in the morning he would like to run from it, enter the sunlight, and forget it.



## CHAPTER VII

### *Mr. Tom Bowden is Proud*

#### I

**I**N the morning he was cheerful again. Peace had come last night, and sleep, with the resolution, "There it is. I must accept it. No man gets the 100 per cent. life he imagines for himself, or the 100 per cent. wife. Florrie's a good little thing, and pretty, and we'll mark her at fully 80 per cent. That there's 20 per cent. missing of what I wanted I must cheerfully accept. I *do* accept it." And when the morning brought a gay arrival through the hall-door, and a voice that was hearty, if a little rich, "Florrie, are yer in? . . . Is the Captain there? . . . Stephen, me lad, are you there?" Stephen laughed gaily as he tossed down his Sunday paper, and went into the passage to meet Mr. Tom Bowden. "I accept it," thought he. "I cheerfully accept it."

"Gawd! Strike me pink, *what* a toff!" was his father-in-law's greeting. "It's Douglas 'Aig himself, isn't it? . . . Florrie, why didn't you tell us you had the Commander-in-Chief stoppin' the week-end with you? . . . I say, Stephen; you look the part all right. Put it there, me lad." It was genuine and happy admiration, and he endorsed it with the offer of his large red hand.

"I accept it," thought Stephen, shaking the hand, and grinning his pleasure at the flattery.

"Florrie let us know you were coming, and invited the missus and I to a bit of supper to-night, but I couldn't wait—I tell you, I couldn't wait. I said I shan't see him to-night in his riding breeks and Sam-Browne and gaiters

and all that, because they wear slacks, these officers do, at dinner-time. Now look here, what about"—he winked and tossed his head over his shoulder in the direction of the streets—"what about a tiddley? Just to celebrate your home-coming. You leave Florrie to her washing-up and cooking. I always believe in leaving the women alone of a Sunday morning. Go to church if you can, but if you can't, and I don't find it easy meself, go where there are other good things. Come on, Stephen, this'll be my treat."

Stephen shook his head with a smile, and the old man's disappointment seemed as real as his admiration.

"Oh come, Stephen. *Do* come. I'd like a friend or two to see you, straight I would. I want you to come to the Bishop's Arms. It'll be my treat."

"I should like to, but I can't. You see—I—I'm not allowed to—it's absurd, of course—but, being an officer, I'm only allowed into a certain type of hotel."

"Course you are! That's right and proper! An officer's an officer, all said and done, and should *be* an officer. 'S'no good hob-nobbin' with the rank and file. But I shan't take you into the common bar. I couldn't if I wanted to, because the War's shut the Sunday pubs. I'll take you somewhere"—he winked with all one side of his face—"where nobody'll see you except them that's in the trade. Us in the trade know a little way round these War-time regulations—first on the left, and straight through the cloisters, see? You come on. A walk of a Sunday morning—do you get me?—and an accidental passing of the Bishop's Arms, and all of a sudden a kind thought to go in and inquire after the health of the landlord; he comes to the side door—'God bless my soul, Tommy, is that you? How is it you ain't at church? Come in, do'—and in you trot. 'Better have a drink now you're here, Tommy.'—'*Werl*'"—Mr. Bowden spread his hands in a gesture of deprecation and doubt—"'*Werl* . . . thanks . . . I don't mind if I do. Not



too much as early as this,' and there you are! Come on, Stephen. She"—indicating the kitchen—"don't want you just now."

"All right," consented Stephen, thinking, "I have accepted it. Let's make the old scoundrel happy."

"That's the spirit! That's the spirit that'll win the war! Come on, then. . . . I'm takin' him out, Florrie. Don't want him, do you?"

They passed into the road, and in due course, on to a tram, Mr. Bowden talking encouragingly all the time, as if he feared his companion might at any stage turn round and go home again. The tram's halt delivered them at the foot of the Fulham Road, and Mr. Bowden walked up it rather doubtfully and apologetically, using his talk, like a hockey stick, to dribble the valuable companion along by his side. The goal through which he finally dribbled Stephen was the side door of the Bishop's Arms.

"Eddy, this is my son-in-law, Captain Gallimore," said he, presenting him to a shirt-sleeved landlord. "I just brought him along."

"Delighted to see you, sir. Come in. Come in, Captain."

They walked into a sitting-room behind the bar.

"Better have a drink now you're here, Tom," said the landlord.

"Thanks, Eddy, I don't mind if I do."

"And you, sir?"

"Thank you . . . yes."

The landlady entering inquisitively, Mr. Bowden at once repeated:

"This is my young son-in-law, Mrs. Richards: Captain Gallimore."

And when a charwoman came in with a broom and tea leaves, and began to retire with apologies, he was careful to say, "Don't mind us; don't mind us. Captain Gallimore won't mind. This is my son-in-law, Captain Gallimore."

## THE OLD TREE BLOSSOMED

Stephen did not correct the title to Lieutenant, being softened by his father-in-law's pride. Besides, his mind had hardly alighted in the place where his body was sitting : it was flying overhead with eyes on escape. Not so Mr. Bowden's ; his seemed more eager to discover how he could stay. As some mystics can find their mental quiescence only when they set their feet in the eternities, so did Mr. Bowden lose his restlessness only when he felt his feet on the sawdust of a bar-parlour.

" I can't stay long," said Stephen. " I feel I ought to be returning to Florrie."

" No, don't go, don't go. Never hang about a household in the morning. It's all cooking in the kitchen, and brooms and slops on the stairs. And we may have some friends in here soon. I'd like 'em to see you."

" I've only a little while with Florrie," reminded Stephen.

" Well, I'll come if I must. But I don't want to—not a bit. When the drink's in, the will's out, as the saying goes. Still——"

" No, don't you trouble. I can go alone. You're comfortable, and I shall see you this evening."

" Yes, there's that." Relieved, Mr. Bowden relaxed into his chair. " I shall see you again. . . . Hi ! Eddy, the captain's going."

In answer to this the landlord hurried in, bringing the rag with which he had been cleaning the Bottle and Jug Department. He wiped his hands with it, and offered one to Stephen.

" Pleased to have met you, I'm sure, Captain. Hope we'll see you again. . . . Hi, Sophie, the gentleman's going."

The landlady bustled in. " Oh, must you go ? " asked she, as a good hostess should, trying to conceal her preoccupation with other things. " Pleased to have met you, I'm sure."

" I'll be coming on later, Stephen," called Mr. Bowden



from his chair. . . . "Eddy, bring us another of these. . . ." The last words Stephen heard as he went out were, "That's an exceptional young man, Eddy—quite exceptional. And he's got influence, and all. Family influence. I shall expect to see him Majoring it any day of the week. He'll get his battalion, like as not. . . ."

## II

When Mr. and Mrs. Bowden arrived for supper, it was plain from the old gentleman's silence, his expression of mingled bedazement and benignance, and his meaningless smile, disturbed only by the periodical necessity of controlling a persistent hiccough, that he was at the very frontier of the misty, glamorous, holiday country of Intoxication. Another glass or two and he would be past its Customs and happy in its merry hinterland. At present he sat quietly in his chair, his hands on his knees, his face turning to Florrie or to Mrs. Bowden or to Stephen, according as each spoke some words that were foggy to him, and his smile accompanying his gaze. Several times they thought he was going to speak and turned towards him, but he was only keeping down and battenning behind his lips that restive Jack-in-the-box of a hiccough. Mrs. Bowden talked with naturalness and volubility to hide her husband's condition, and Stephen, in generosity, played up to her bluff.

"Supper," announced Florrie, when she had brought in the last of the dishes.

"Oh yes. Supper," echoed Mr. Bowden, reminiscent of what he had come for.

"Come along, Tom," called his wife gaily.

"Supper," smiled Mr. Bowden, and rose to the occasion.

They took their places at the table, Mrs. Bowden anxiously and loquaciously on Stephen's right, and Mr. Bowden grinningly and silently on his left. His eyes were straying towards the sideboard, in furtive examination of the drinks provided.

"Give your father something to drink, Florrie."

Florrie got up, with no demurring word or significant look, because all were pretending that it was quite safe to give further drinks to Mr. Bowden. She poured out his glass behind him, with the professional air of the waitress she had been, and Mr. Bowden turned about to watch and smile upon the process. Meanwhile, Mrs. Bowden poured out her voluble diversion to Stephen.

Mr. Bowden, having taken the glass, drank to within a third of its bottom, and then passed the ball of his thumb along his lips. At that point he went off with a notable report.

"'Scuse me, 'scuse me," he muttered. "It'll stop soon. It's a long lane that has no turning"; and he drank a little more as if to hasten the defeat of this insubordination in his throat.

But now he was inclined to speak. He spread his smile like a June sky over the expanse of cold meat and potato-salad that Stephen had placed before him.

"Quite a 'laboret supper, Florrie. Shouldn't have gone t'auris trouble." He took mustard unsteadily. "I always say—I always say's no supper in this world or next to touch a hunk of breeze and a slice of cheese—I mean, a hunk of bread and a"—he whipped his wits to obedience—"and a breece of cheese—and an onion. A large Spanish one—onion. That, and a pewter mugger beer. It's sigh-deal supper—rely."

"It is good," agreed Stephen.

"There's many starvin' to-night," said Mr. Bowden sententiously, "who'd give anything for it—rely."

"Yes, I'm sure there are."

Mr. Bowden nodded. "Sure of it." There being unanimity on this point, he said no more till, after a ruminant chewing of his potato salad, he offered, "It's better than co'potato."

"Well, we can get it for you, I expect," laughed Stephen.



"No. No. Please don't," begged Mr. Bowden, taking him quite seriously and raising a bland deprecatory palm. "I've au'right require. This co'potato business is excellent—rely. Pass us s'more, Molly. . . . Thanks." He helped himself largely. "Lord, how I shall dream to-night!"

"When do you think you'll be going to the front, Stephen?" put in Mrs. Bowden.

"I don't know. The sooner the better."

"Oh no!" corrected his father-in-law. "Don't say that, don't say that, Stephen. We don't want to lose you yet. Too few good men—rely."

"You talk as if I were sure to be killed."

"Oh no. . . . No, no. . . ." He tried to pull his thinking together. "But you're safer in England—rely. It's, fr'm all accounts—it's what I call—if you'll forgive me—pretty b——y out there."

"I suppose it is."

"Sure of it," reported Mr. Bowden, after examining his thoughts about the front. "There's no other way to express it, that I can think of."

"It's a literal description, at any rate," laughed Mrs. Bowden.

Stephen replenished the old man's glass.

"Thank you. Thank you, Stephen." The bland palm stopped him as soon as the glass was quite full. "Bass. Good stuff, Bass. Better than anything we brew in our yard. From the first drop you can feel the God-bless-you going all the way down. Ours doesn't warm you like that, though I say it myself. It stays longer, too, Bass does. It lasts. I've known what it is to be sitting quiet and enjoying a glass of Bass an hour after I'd drunk it. I've known what it is to be enjoying it the next morning—enjoying it quietly while I shaved. Ours doesn't stop as long as that. If Germans come, I always say, mustn't be allowed to damage Bass's Brewery. Buckenham Pallus they can have, and welcome, but not

Bass's. That we must defend with our last drop of blood. We must conc'ntrate th' armies and th' High Command at Burton-on-Trent, Stephen. Ev'ry Englishman 'll answer that call. They'll come fr'm East, West, South and North. I shall be there meself, in the forefront of the battle—— Eh? Joo take me, Stephen?" He laughed in great appreciation of his jest, but the laugh unfortunately concluded with a slight report. "'Scuse me! Good snakes, Molly; I'm like a walking air-raid this evening."

Stephen roared with laughter; and Mr. Bowden wiped his lips with his handkerchief.

"Well, the 'All Clear's' gone now, I think."

Florrie jumped up to remove the plates, while Mr. Bowden turned his head to watch her taking his, as if wondering where it was going to, and why. Then he smiled over the blank place in the table-cloth, and Mrs. Bowden continued her lively chatter, till Florrie had brought in the trifle which she had been building and decorating all the morning. As she laid it down, her father watched with glazed eyes, and a smile; it was plain that though he was staring at it, he had not apprehended it, but when suddenly his intellect pierced through the glaze, and he saw the cream and the jam, the angelica and the almonds, he exclaimed:

"I can't have that. Not after the co'potato business."

"There's brandy in it," laughed Stephen.

"Werl—then I'll risk it, Stephen. You boys are takin' your risks to-day, and we old men must take ours. That's the spirit that'll win the war." He laughed uproariously. "But I'm not happy about this trifle—relly. Not after the co'potato business."



## CHAPTER VIII

### *After Supper*

#### I

IT will be imagined how Mr. Bowden's deportment to-night had gradually driven out Stephen's "acceptance" and substituted despair. At first he was almost at rest in the completeness of his despair, as when a dangling, worried platform of baggage that the crane is lowering finds its stillness in the black bottom of the hold. It was a passive despair. But it became active: he grew used, as it were, to the darkness and saw again, in awful reality, his life-sentence to relationship with these Bowdens, his revulsion from Florrie, and his distrust of himself lest from now onward he should willy-nilly torture her. He began to drink rather wildly; and when his restraints were weakening, the suppressed agony of it all burst through in a devilish little plan: let him make this old clown as drunk as he could for the humiliation of Florrie and the justification of himself; let him see to it that, between them, they had to carry the clown home. It was a sudden, passionate rebellion against this perfect antithesis of all his dreams.

"Break another bottle of whisky, Florrie," he commanded, as they sat about the fire-place, after the meal.

"I shouldn't give him any more whisky," murmured Mrs. Bowden, for the first time abandoning her screen of naturalness.

"Oh yes," laughed Stephen. "Who knows when we shall get an opportunity of drinking again. You'd like another tot or two, wouldn't you, Dad?"

"It'd keep the trifle quiet," agreed Mr. Bowden.

"Of course it would. Hustle it up, Florrie."

Florrie didn't move, and Stephen glared at her. He got up and laughingly fetched the decanter from the sideboard cupboard. "Here we are! Say when, Dad; say when. There! Have some, Mummie? No? All right—now mine."

"Here's to Stephen," toasted Mr. Bowden. "And may he soon be a colonel!"

"Or a corpse," added Stephen, drinking the toast.

"Not a corpse. Not a corpse."

Mr. Bowden dreamed on this point for some time; and then, having found a happier excuse for drinking, lifted a shaking glass.

"To Speedy Victory. Speedy Victory!"

"Yes, to speedy victory," acknowledged Stephen, "provided I get my share of killing first."

"And death to Kaiser and Hind'burg and Lu'dorf!"

Stephen nodded significantly.

"Yes, death to all those better dead."

"'Ear, 'ear! Let *them* do the corpsing!"

On this important wish Mr. Bowden emptied his glass, and his host began to charge it again, saying, "Another little tot, boss? Yes, just another little tot."

"Don't, Stephen!" pleaded Florrie; but in rebellious response he made the little tot as large as he could.

"I'm afraid we shall not be able to stop very long," tried poor Mrs. Bowden.

"Why?" demanded her husband indignantly. "I tell you I'm stopping with Stephen. This may be the last time I shall see him for a long time."

("God grant it!" prayed Stephen. "For a hell of a time!")

"He's going out—he's going out to fight our battle, and we're proud of him. I think it's—it's—'s no small honour to drink with him. When he's tired of us, he'll tell us, won't you, meboy? Will you tell us, or will you not? Can missus and I rely on you to tell us?"



Stephen only answered by staring at the old man with a contemptuous grin, which he hoped Florrie was watching.

"*Can* we rely on you to tell us?" demanded Mr. Bowden, getting argumentative, and perhaps seeing the grin through his haze and dimly distrusting it. "'Cos if we can't, we better go at once. Better go now."

"I really think it would be better if we did," suggested Mrs. Bowden, half rising.

"So far from wanting you to go," assured Stephen, filling his glass again. "I only want you to stay and drink with me till you're tired. When you're tired, you'll tell me, won't you, Dad? I'm relying on you for that."

"I'll tell you. I'll tell you, if I'm in co'dition to, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha!" echoed Stephen, with dead mirthlessness. "He, he!"

"What you laughing at? You aren't laughing at me, are yer?"

"Good Lord, no! You're nothing to laugh at. I'm only so pleased you can stop."

"There! 'E don't want us to go," expounded Mr. Bowden to his wife. "'E says so."

"As if I should want my wife's father to go! After my own father and mother, aren't they my nearest and dearest?" Stephen, less used to long drinking, was now nearly as drunk as his guest. "Who else have I? Who else? Tell me that?"

"Well, that's nice of you, Stephen. That was nicely put, wasn't it, Molly? 'S'nearest and dearest. And I say I'm proud of my nephew. My sunner-law, I mean."

"Not half so proud as your nephew is of you, Uncle. Give us your glass."

"Stephen!" It was a piteous cry from Florrie, who put out a hand and drew away her father's glass. Stephen snatched it from her, and filled it tremblingly.

"Go on, Pa! Drink it up. Don't mind Florrie."

## THE OLD TREE BLOSSOMED

We shan't have a war again. Or neither you nor I'll be here to see it."

Mr. Bowden drank, choked a little. Mrs. Bowden rose.

"Come, Tom. Come. Between you, you're making Florrie unhappy. And if you ask me, I don't think either of you ought to drink any more." She put a hand under his arm, to help him up. "Come, dear, let us go."

"Whar—wharrer you doin'?" demanded Mr. Bowden, but getting up, because too witless to refuse. "Why—why mus' we go? Stephen hasn't said so. . . ."

His weight was resting on his wife who was not strong enough to support it, and he fell to the floor.

"Oh Chri'!" he exclaimed, and remained on his elbow.

## II

The crash, for Mr. Bowden had fallen heavily, sobered Stephen. He hurried to his assistance and raised him up. It had also done something towards sobering Mr. Bowden, who was able to stagger to the door, followed by a silent Florrie and her white mother. Stephen, both ashamed and doggedly defiant, procured a cab, put husband and wife in it, muttered, "He'll be all right by the time you're home," and bade good-night to an unanswering couple. When he returned into the living-room, Florrie was facing him.

"I think you're a beast," she said.

Stephen laughed cynically.

"When in Rome, do as the Romans do."

"What do you mean by that?"

"I matched myself to my company."

"You mean Daddy?"

"Don't remind me that he is your father more often than you need."

"Well"—Florrie's cheeks flamed—"I think I'd rather be the daughter of my dear old father than the wife of a loathsome cad."



## AFTER SUPPER

He took a step towards her ; she one backwards. But she resolved to repeat her blow on her father's side. "After all, it's better to be weak than wicked."

"Here ! 'Loathsome' 's a word I don't care for, Florrie. You can just take it back."

Florrie shrank, but fired as she did so, "I shan't. You know you behaved cruelly to both of them—to poor Daddy, in making fun of his weakness, and still more to Mummy. Me—I don't count."

"Pooh ! I only did the honours of your home to your parent in the way he appreciates most. I'm all for making people happy."

"You made Mummy most happy, didn't you, and me ?"

Stephen moved away. All the right was on her side, and anger had given her the wit to see and express it. He remained silent, sinking slowly from the not unpleasant heights of temper to the dull valley of his pain and his self-disgust.

"I only made my supper in your honour," said Florrie.

"Florrie . . ."

"I don't want to speak to you. Ever again."

"Florrie . . . can't you think something of my happiness when I see what sort of father-in-law I've got, and what sort of grandparent Ruth has got ?"

"We're common, I know. And you're ashamed of me, and wish you'd never married me. I've seen it for months."

Stephen stared at the window. "I don't know that I'm anything so very much, if it comes to that."

"Oh, but you're better than me. . . . O Stephen, why did you do it ? How can Mother ever speak to you again ? How can I ever forget it ?"

"Well, no doubt I shall be finally out of your way in a month or two."

He despised himself for sounding this note.

Florrie was crying. "I imagined it would be so different, your coming home."

## THE OLD TREE BLOSSOMED

When bewildered, one is apt to walk to the window, where there is usually light, and open places. But the blind was down, and he stood staring at its blankness.

"Let's drop it, Florrie. I'm sorry if I was caddish. I was—but I was suffering. You see, when women feel as I was feeling, they can cry, but men can't, and—it has to burst out somehow, I suppose. . . . I know! I'll write to your mother and tell her I'd been drinking before they came—but that it seldom shows with me. That'll drop me to the level of her husband, and make everything much easier for her. I'll ask her to forgive me, and that'll put her on a pedestal again. I'll do what I can, Florrie. I'll write to her from the camp. And come, give me a kiss. I'm sorry, but I was—I was in pain."



## CHAPTER IX

### *The Second Edith*

#### I

THE next evening after tea Stephen kissed Florrie good-bye in his hall. It was the sad kiss of those who have quarrelled and are being very polite, though conscious that the bruises are still aching. He walked out on to the steps, and she stood in the doorway to see him into the waiting taxi. Seated in the cab, he looked up at the narrow, dusky house, with Florrie framed in the doorway. He drank of bitterness as he saw the soiled and torn lace curtains in the lodgers' windows and the yard of torn grass between the area railings and the basement. And Florrie in the doorway, though neat and pretty, seemed, alas ! of a piece with it all.

"That is what we are. What's the good of pretending ?" He was waving to her as he thought this. "That is what I belong to, and what I am. All the rest is a dream."

There was a grinding sound as the gears of the taxi engaged protestingly ; they were moving, and again he waved and smiled. But he sickened at the falsity of his smile, and the knowledge that Florrie's answering wave was the gallant flourish of a child in pain.

"All the rest is a dream. That is what I am."

Strange, this sudden relief, this mental rest, that he found as he lolled wealthily in the first-class compartment ; as he drove in a respectful taxi to the Officers' Lines ; as his servant came running like Gehazi and lifted his valise from the footboard ; as he found in his tent his tunic and slacks brushed and folded on the camp-bed ;

as the Major welcomed him with a "Gallimore! What cheer! Back again? Sergeant, send a Martini for Mr. Gallimore."

The dream had captured him. That he saw. He had given himself to it, and outside of it was no more satisfaction for him.

## II

In his youthful days Edith with her yellow head had been the lodelight of his dreamland, and it was fitting that, now when he had entered its pleasant and opulent gardens, he should have found there a second Edith. He met her, as I have told you, at Jim Harlow's.

"And you shall see our little Hun," Jim had said, when Stephen consented to spend his leave in Sussex. "We are harbouring one of the King's enemies at Woolands, you know—yes, she's registered and reports to the police and may not move more than five miles from her residence, and all that."

An immensely stimulating girl, said Jim. A Dorothea Keller, daughter of Keller, Keller, and Zimmermann, the bank which used to work with Harlow's, Ltd. Very old friends. And Dorothea came over from Berlin every year, and got nicely caught in August, 1914. But she was *some* girl!

"Yours?" inquired Stephen.

No such luck, bewailed Jim. She was engaged to a blasted German dragoon, who was fighting most efficiently for the Fatherland.

"But there are bullets buzzing about," reminded Stephen.

Jim said, "Yes—but——" and admitted that his heart was no longer free; it was seriously involved elsewhere.

They arrived at Woolands on Saturday at tea-time, and were shown into a drawing-room that gave Stephen a stabbing memory of his own front living-room.

"This is Mother," said Jim, presenting him to just



such a thin, grey, well-dressed lady as he had foreseen. "And this is Dorothea. Dorothea ; Mr. Gallimore, One of Ours."

Stephen saw a young, fair girl, who could hardly have been twenty-two. He had an instant impression of lit eyes, a perfect nose, a lovely balance, a golden dress—of all that made the vague ideal of a frequent reverie. She stabbed him as the drawing-room had done ; she was too cruel a materialization.

He bowed coldly, as the shy people will, when their feelings prompt to warmer ways.

Is it possible that Dorothea, notwithstanding her German dragoon, had indulged illicit reveries too, and seen in them a figure very like Stephen's ? I think it must have been so. She had withdrawn from Stephen during tea-time, just as he had withdrawn from her ; but she would stare at him when he wasn't looking just as he would steal long glances at her, and once or twice, as was bound to be, their glances met and swung uncomfortably away. Let it be remembered that *both* saw stabbing materializations. There could have been few handsomer officers in Kitchener's Crowd than Lieutenant Gallimore ; the gloss in his fair hair answered the buff of his uniform, the high lights in his brass buttons, and the ruddy tan that route marches and field days had laid upon his skin.

After tea Mrs. Harlow, desiring to entertain their guest, made Dorothea sing ; and she sang German and English songs in a voice that, though well trained, had the simplicity of a schoolgirl's. Stephen, from a window seat, stared at her. As yet they had hardly spoken to each other, but he knew, none the less, that she was more anxious to impress Jim's friend than anyone else in the room.

After dinner, at which she appeared in a disturbing china-blue dress, there was impromptu dancing with visitors from a neighbouring house, and Stephen sought

her for his partner as often as he dared. Some of the dancers wandered out on to the terrace, and he longed to lure her there, but lacked the words. It was she who said first, "It's warm, isn't it? Shall we go outside? If you'll be an angel and get me my fur—it's that white thing on the chair. . . ."

Stephen hurried across the floor to the white thing, returned with it, put it gently about her shoulders, and lifted a curtain through which she passed on to the terrace.

"Golly!"—she spoke perfect English—"what a lot of people!" There were, to be exact, two couples on the terrace. "Let's wander down into the garden."

His heart quickened at the invitation, though warning him that it might be only the natural coquetting of a young girl. She led the way down a flight of steps to a seat under the lee of the terrace. The moon most aptly gave her light. On the seat she waited for him to speak.

"I am interested in you," he said.

"Kind! Why?" Her lit eyes turned smilingly to his.

"I think it's because you remind me of some one I was in love with when I was a boy. She was German too, curiously enough. *And* a banker's daughter—good heavens! I had forgotten that. When she was twenty-two, which must have been six or seven years ago, I think she must have been very like you."

"Why didn't you marry her?"

"She was only about fourteen, and I was sixteen."

"Oh, you must have been an angelic little couple! Was she a nice lover?"

"I never spoke to her. I only admired from a distance."

"And now you are trying to imagine I am she?"

"It would be very lovely to think so."

"I wonder if that's a pretty speech or not. I don't know. I think I'd rather be myself than the ghost of some one else."



"Tell me something about yourself."

"Well, I am not German, as you said just now. I refuse to be: Mother was English, and I was *almost* born in England, and my education is partly English. But Father is German—there's no denying that—but he's quite a darling, all the same."

"And your fiancé?"

"Oh, Friedrich. Yes, Friedrich's a hundred per cent. German—not to say a hundred and fifty per cent. The way he bore down and captured me when I was nineteen—that was true German, *hein*?"

"So when you marry, there'll be no dodging it—you'll be completely of the Fatherland."

"I wonder," she mused, looking at her crossed feet.

"Is he fighting now?"

"I'm afraid so. I *hate* his fighting the English. Do you think it awfully disloyal of me?"

"How can I think so, when I am English? But you must be very anxious."

"Of course I am. Friedrich is rather a cherub in his way."

(A doubtful note, that. "Come, Stephen; come, my lad," so ran his thinking. "You must pull yourself together. You must put away this wild hope. Remember Uriah the Hittite, in the forefront of the battle. Come, exert your will, and lift yourself out of this." But people in a luxurious bed, or a grateful, soothing bath, have said no less, and stayed, and been ashamed.)

"Tell me, when do you expect to get back to Germany?"

"Heaven knows. If it were not for Friedrich, I don't think I'd want to go back."

("Supposing Uriah the Hittite fell—supposing he were already dead—No, Stephen, put away these thoughts.")

"I hope you get news of him all right."

"Yes, fairly frequently."

"Isn't he anxious for you over here?"

"Not he! Not Friedrich. He writes that he's coming to fetch me with half a million men."

"H'm. He shan't do that. There's five million Englishmen in arms—to know the reason why. . . . I say, which side are you really on?"

She hesitated before replying.

"Yours. I can't help it."

"Oh, I am glad."

"Is it very dreadful? I can't help it. Honestly I can't. I love the English. I love all these dear, sweet people here—the Harlows. Is it awful of me, do you think?"

"No, it is natural. You belong to us. You belong to us."

### III

This, thought he, when wakeful in bed that night, had been a beginning strangely charged with emotion. Though they had said nothing committal their emotion had escaped in overtones. "She feels about me much as I feel about her. I know it. One *catches* these things like heliograph messages. She is as disturbed by me as I am by her." What a warming, body-stirring thought! That one so lovely, so young, and so wealthy was probably—was certainly thinking about him in her bed at this minute! His head raced. To-morrow? A few more hours, and he would be at her side again. How would the story unroll to-morrow? Where would they be to-morrow night?

To-morrow was Sunday, and they all went to the village church. And throughout the service Stephen was thinking, "She is by my side. And she is Edith over again. She might well be the child at whom I used to gaze, hopeless of ever knowing her. And here I am, her companion, and what is more, disturbing her by my presence. I have sat and talked in the dark with her. I shall do so again to-night."



They were dancing again that night. Their friends of the previous evening had come in for supper, and when it was over, had helped to push back the furniture and the rugs in the large drawing-room, and then danced to the playing of Mrs. Harlow. Stephen, dancing with Dorothea, was silent; he was content to look down upon the straight parting in her hair, and think "Is it possible—is it possible that she is in my arms? . . . And, Dorothea, you are thinking something about me, you know you are. What are you really like, dear? I know nothing about you. Are you good? Are you bad? You can flirt, I suppose—but what is that?—you are young. What visions are there down in that little head? Are you picturing a love-story with me?"

Neither did Dorothea speak at all or raise her eyes. And this was surely the sweetest of signs, for he had noticed that when she danced with Jim Harlow or other men, she was talkative, radiant, and looked impudently into their faces: The impulse to whisper something tender swelled in him.

"I suppose I shall have these few days with you, and then lose you for ever again."

"I suppose it'll be like that."

"I don't want to."

Now she lifted her face and looked at him.

"Why should you mind?"

"Heaven knows!"

"Rude? Aren't you?"

"I didn't mean to be. . . . I feel I want to know much more of you. I want to know all about you. One does when one is interested in some one, doesn't one?"

"Of course."

"Well, let's sit where we did last night, and talk."

They moved from the drawing-room to the terrace, he guiding her gently by the arm. Stephen in these hours had no memories of the indigent clerk of Leicester's. His new, well-tailored uniform, like enchanted clothes,

seemed to have changed him into an easy inhabitant of this luxurious world ; and now, with its gardens all around him, and the best-loved of its nymphs at his side, he felt as satisfied as in his happiest day-dreams he had designed to be. His cool, elegant mastery of this girl flattered him. Her yielding was an unspeakable joy that rarefied his breathing and made his throat ache. On the terrace he took her hand, pretending to lead her with gallantry down the steps to the seat under the wall. Here, sitting at her side, he retained her hand, as if it were something he had picked up in the dance-room. Absent-mindedly he began to stroke it.

"Thank you," she laughed. "That's very pleasant."

Stephen heeded not. Staring over the valley beyond the garden to where the hedges and coppices and the distant downs were shadow-rounded in the moonlight and the sky was a recession of radiance behind it all, he began, "When one is interested . . ." and stopped defeated, his chin thrown forward.

"You are really interested in me?" murmured Dorothea.

"My dear, I—may I answer that truthfully?"

"Why not?"

"And you will grant me a free pardon for all that I may say?"

"Surely."

"You—you held my eyes the first moment I came within sight of you. You were like a picture in a gallery that drew me instantly to its feet and would not allow me to look at any other. You hurt—hurt like—like homesickness . . . and partings . . . and bereavement . . . and growing old . . . and all the heartaches of life rolled into one."

"Are you a poet?"

"Every man is a poet as soon as he looks at you. To be a poet it only needs, I suppose, that one is moved . . . and hurt . . . and speaks aloud of one's hurt."



You are a pain in every man's heart, my dear—in the heart of every man whose path you cross. Your destiny, for a few years more, is to go about the world distributing pain. You cannot escape it. It's not your fault; it's your beauty's fault."

"I don't think I like what you're saying now."

"Dear, you love it. You *must* do; because you know that, though you are a pain to us, it is a pain that is precious. Precious while we suffer it, and precious in memory."

She answered him no more, but looked at the brilliant sky. And he, after silent word-seeking, asked:

"Shall I tell you what you are?"

Silence; and moisture glistening in Dorothea's eyes.

"You are the portrait of everything that every man has longed for, and that every man believes he has missed. You can't help it, my dear. I don't blame you."

Her hand began to tremble in his; and he stood up and drew her to her feet.

"Come, let us walk round the garden. You're cold."

Carelessly linking their fingers together, they walked down a sloping path bordered with espalier fruit trees to the lawns below the horse-chestnuts. They wandered, linked together, under the long pergolas, and round the lily pools, and down the dangerous shelter of the yew lane to the orchard walls. They said nothing more that had not its safe interpretation as well as its dangerous, nor did they take the kiss that each was thinking of; for it was not in Stephen to be quick and facile with caresses; but sometimes as they stood to look at the gold-fishes in the pool, or the fruit on the wall, or to listen to the call of a night owl, she leaned her shoulder close to his, and he trembled and understood.



It was from this that he had turned deliberately away to spend his next leave with Florrie in English Road.

## IV

On his return from that disastrous leave he thought much, thought always of a surrender to Dorothea. The very pain in his memory made him hunger for beauty. And time was short. Let him leave England, and he might never have the chance of young, fresh kiss again. An old seed, sown playfully by Miss Magnus a dozen years before, came to its fruition now. "Stephen, I don't want you to miss your chances with Edith. Don't be afraid. Don't miss a beautiful thing through shyness. Yes, yes, nothing may come of it, but it'll be a happy memory for you both till the end. The more of such memories we have the better." He had missed Edith; should he miss Dorothea?

And when their next short leave was due, and Jim said, "What about it, this time, Stephen?"—because his heart ached at the sight of others so eager to go to their homes, while he was so afraid—he answered, "Yes. I'm coming with you this time."

It was winter now, and Mrs. Harlow and Dorothea welcomed them by the blazing logs in their great Lounge Hall. But did not Dorothea seem different from last time; cold in her greeting, and her gaiety absent, her impudence stilled. Watching her as they sat round the fire after dinner, Stephen observed how she gazed into its glowing hollows, with little heed for the chatter that was leaping among the chairs. Hers was the silence and remoteness of one who is coming to terms with an insistent sadness; and by the sure, quick telepathy of love, he knew the whole of her trouble. It was himself—no more. Brief though that night walk in the gardens had been, it had left the complete impress; she knew that she was his—and could never be his. How selfish was love, thought Stephen, for of all the poignantly happy things he had known, there was nothing so sweet as this vision, on which he could feast his eyes, of Dorothea's pain.



They had but two nights at Woolands, and on the last evening, he resolved to be bold. Before dinner he waylaid her on the stairs as she went up to dress. "Dorothea."

"Yes?" She looked frightened; he had not called her Dorothea before.

"Give me a moment with you alone to-night."

"Why?"

"Because it's our last night."

"Why should that make you want to see me alone?"

"Confound it, dear. I can't tell you here. I'll tell you to-night."

"Where shall it be?" She looked down at her hand resting on the bannister.

"Wherever the others are not. If the others are in the Lounge, I'll be waiting by the fire in the Ottoman Room. If they take to the Ottoman Room, I'll be waiting in the Lounge. You'll come, won't you?"

"If you want me to—if it's important—yes. But I can't think——"

"I'll tell you when you come."

The hangings and divans, the Indian brasses and Damascus stools of the Ottoman Room were lighted only by the glow of a wood fire, when Stephen entered after dinner, somewhat guiltily, and sat himself in a long chair. He drew towards his feet a *pouffe* that it might be a seat for Dorothea; and this setting of the stage inflated his excitement and his nervousness. From then—for long minutes—for a quarter of an hour—for half an hour—his heart was restless; his hearing keyed for her approach. Nothing happened, and his heart became a weight in his body, sinking; his hearing strained to abnormal powers, catching every movement and every voice in the house. Ah . . . Yes . . . Joy! Joy! This was her diffident step. . . . She was entering, . . . with her eyebrows frowning at the firelight.

"Sit down, dear. Here."

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She sat on the *pouffe* at his feet.

"Look here——" he began, and stopped.

"I am looking," replied she, striving to be frivolous.

"Look here, we're not going to let this discovery of one another perish to-morrow, are we? We must meet sometimes. Are you ever in town?"

"I can get a permit."

"Well, we must lunch together sometimes, for old acquaintance' sake. I'm not going to let you go now I've found you."

"But I should *love* to lunch with you."

"Good! And we'll write, won't we? I'm sure we're destined to be friends, or we should never have met like this—and liked each other so well. I may say that, mayn't I?"

"Yes." It was a whispered word.

"And you *will* write to me?"

"Yes. I should like to."

"And I may write to you?"

"I should love you to. I am lonely enough, sometimes."

A silence, during which his passion gathered and broke.

"O Dorothea . . ."

God! Her head had bent, and she was crying! He was on his knees, his arm round her.

"Dorothea. . . . Oh, my darling. . . . No, I'd better not write . . . I'd better run away from you. Darling, I love you . . . I can't help it. Oh, I suppose it'd have been better if I'd never seen you. . . ."

"Dorothea, tell me . . . say something . . . tell me to go or stay. I can see nothing in the world but you. Tell me to go, if you must, and forgive me. . . . You will forgive me, I know. You have no right to do anything but to forgive a man who's only been caught by your beauty. Dorothea, what am I to do?"

"Hush! . . ." Gently she unclosed his arms.  
"You mustn't do anything. Let us be friends, as you



said, and just write, and I'll come to lunch with you and behave properly. It's a dull arrangement, behaving properly, isn't it?" She smiled under her tears. "I think I've grown a lot in the last—in the last month or two. Let us just be good friends. . . . We can keep our heads."

"Does that mean you love me too?"

"Certainly not, proud man."

"But you do, dear? Just say once that you do. I feel that all I want is the knowledge that you love me. I can do without everything else, if I can know and remember always that you loved me."

Wherein spoke Mr. Gallimore's son. Dorothea looked down, without an answer.

"Dorothea, just say it once—just once. If I've heard you say it, I feel I can win to some sort of peace. Say just once, 'I love you as much as you love me.' Say that, and I'll have it to keep for the rest of my life."

She shook her head. "If I said that, I don't think it would be right for us to meet and correspond and be friends."

"Oh, yes it would, dear. I want you just to say it if it's true, and I'll pack it away, and never trouble you with talk of love again. If you don't say it, I shall believe for ever that it's not true. And I shall be ashamed always of what I have said and done. Think of my everlasting shame, and say it, Dorothea."

He had caught her hands now, and was pressing them. As she turned her face towards him, her eyes were wet, not smiling.

"I *could* have loved you, Stephen. That is all I must say."

It was enough—or so he thought—and he lifted her hands and kissed them gratefully.

## CHAPTER X

### *Orders*

#### I

WITHIN three months of his return to camp his regiment and its sister battalions were under orders for the East. For two years had they awaited these orders, and with their sharp arrival, the Brigade Lines came astir. Rumours collected little crowds at the flaps of tent doors (the Brigade being newly under canvas); rumours, guesses and good wishes were handed with every packet of cigarettes and every tin of apricots over the counter of the Expeditionary Force Canteen; to glance into bell-tents was to see men sitting on their piled kit, not in groups for card games, but in units pencilling letters to their homes; in the Y.M.C.A. Recreation Hut ten men were writing letters for every two playing draughts, and many were neither writing nor playing but chattering in clusters; the Director of the Y.M.C.A. Hut announced on notice-boards, within and without, that the subject of his address at Next Sunday Evening's Popular Service would be "God's Marching Orders," and was immediately asked by the Staff Captain to be less direct in his metaphors, whereupon he changed his title to "It's a long way to Tipperary," and promised a solo by Sergeant Greaves of the R.E.'s, "There's a long, long trail a-winding to the land of my dreams." "Mesopotamia" was the sibilant sound heard in every talkative group; it appeared like an epidemic rash in ninety per cent. of the men's letters, and the weary officers, censoring the letters, straightway scratched it out, and a Brigade Order warned the battalions against this breach of the Censorship



Regulations. "Will there be any last leave?" was the guessing question in the Officers' Lines, for the officers had no need to guess at the Brigade's destination; they knew quite definitely that it was "Mespot" and that the 9th Birmingham would entrain on the following Thursday at 5 a.m., and that the whole Brigade would embark at Devonport just before midnight.

On Sunday, after Church Parade, the C.O. summoned Stephen, in his turn, to the Orderly Room.

"You can have Tuesday afternoon and evening, Gallimore. Twenty-four hours' leave. Report back as early as possible on Wednesday morning."

"Thank you, sir."

"You understand, of course, that it'll be a last sight of your people for Lord knows how many years. Once we get to Mespot, we shall probably stay there till the end of the war, and for a year or two after. If you get any leave out there, it'll be to Ceylon, or Kashmir, or Durban. Interesting places, but a long way from home."

"Yes, sir."

"Good. Send the other subalterns of D Company to me."

So Stephen sent Jim Harlow and young Quaite to the Colonel, and went into his tent to bring a three-days' debate to the final vote. Florrie or Dorothea? Should he be loyal to the fact of his chains or the fact of his love? No doubt on which side his desires fell! Florrie was all pain, Dorothea was all joy; and the whole of his nature was pleading for a few hours of joy. Arguments for the joyous road came in rapid succession: did he not feel kindlier to Florrie when he was away from her; wasn't it the sight and sound of her failings that rasped his nerves; wouldn't it be kinder to her and himself if he took away with him his earlier memories and not a vivid picture of recent pain? And it wasn't as if Florrie would suffer because of his neglect, for she would never know that he had been given these few hours of freedom. He

would write her an affectionate letter of farewell, a happier thing for her to keep than the picture of his malaise in her presence and the recollection of his forced embraces.

And then, on Dorothea's side—what pictures came! He would race down and meet her in the country lanes near Woolands; they would walk together; they would lunch together; they would take tea in some lonely inn; and possibly he would race her up to town and a theatre, unknown to the Harlows and in contempt of police permits. Like truant children they would return together to the garden walls of Woolands, where he would bid her farewell and she would go in with a fib to explain her long absence. Surely she would kiss him, there by the gates at midnight.

Jumping up, as one who has found his decision, he exclaimed, "*Dorothea*. This is a moment for realities, not conventions. It's her I love. And this may be my last chance in life of seeing her. . . . I have all life in front of me with Florrie."

And while the resolve was hot, he sat down and wrote to Dorothea:

DEAR DOROTHEA,—

Please don't fail to be by the sign-post on Wayman's Green by noon on Tuesday. Lunch and a few hours together. Keep the evening free. This is very urgent, and please, please don't fail me.

Your friend,

STEPHEN GALLIMORE.

He was already divided against himself as he carried the sealed letter to the post corporal's tent. But—

Ah! The letter was now in the man's hand—and the thing was done.

Well, hurray! hurray! Tuesday was the only vivid thing in life now. Let the days thereafter look to themselves.



## ORDERS

Next morning he received a wire, "I shall be there, D.K.," and an intruding wave of happiness drowned all thoughts of Florrie. "I'm going to be happy. I'm going to be happy. Surely it's natural to want to be happy in one's last few hours. . . ." In the effervescence of his spirits he felt compelled to talk of theatres with some one, and, meeting Jim Harlow, he called, "What's the best play in town, Jim?"

"Chu-Chin-Chow," said Jim promptly.

"Any chance of getting seats for Tuesday night?"

"Shouldn't think so. How many shall you want?"

"Two, I suppose." His honour would not allow him to add, "Just for the wife and myself," but he was satisfied that Jim interpreted this as his meaning.

"Wire," advised Jim.

"I will." Then came another train of thought. "Have you seen this show?"

"Yes. Saw it two leaves ago."

"With the family?"

"No," Jim grinned. "With a friend."

"Not Miss What's-her-name? Keller?"

"No. Not even with my fiancée. With a friend of a night."

"Oh. You won't be coming again, I suppose?"

"No. I've a fancy to spend my twenty-four hours at home."

"Wise lad."

It was early afternoon, and the prepaid reply from His Majesty's Theatre, assuring him of two stalls, arrived within a couple of hours.

## II

They wandered together, that afternoon, Stephen and Dorothea, walking on and on, down the country lanes. They walked as friends; they thought as lovers. And sometimes the glow from their hidden thoughts broke through and played about their words, faintly gilding

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them. Once when they had sat themselves on a wayside seat, Stephen, looking into her face, said :

“ It’s good of you to give this last day to me.”

“ I think it’s good of you to want me.”

“ I would rather have spent it with you than with anyone else in the world.”

“ But what—— Stephen——”

“ What, dear ? ”

“ I’m worried.”

“ Why ? ”

“ I think you ought to have given these hours to your family.”

With his stick he poked at the grass. “ I don’t see it,” he began, unconvincingly.

“ I do so want to behave properly,” said Dorothea, her eyes widened with doubt. “ Especially at such a time as this.”

“ I see so little of *you*,” explained Stephen. “ And you don’t know what your friendship means to me.”

“ Yes, I do. And I hoped that I was doing right in making you happy. But I am not sure. . . .”

“ You were very right, and very sweet.”

“ But the horrid fact remains that I wouldn’t dare tell anyone of this. Doesn’t that show that it must be wrong—somehow ? I shall have to tell lies about the theatre to-night.” Turning, she smiled on him. “ And you wouldn’t dare publish to the world what you are doing.”

“ That’s the world’s fault, not ours. It wouldn’t understand.”

“ Yes, I suppose that’s it.”

And she came to silence, finding a rest in the thought. Stephen, not speaking, looked at her shoulders, her arms, her crossed feet, and her gloved hand resting on her knee. He was as one deliberately drinking of her presence. An imperious desire beat in him to take that left hand, remove its glove, and link it in his own. This would at least be



a linking with her ; the simplest link, but all that was allowed him. He stretched his fingers towards her hand, and drew it to him. She started, trembled, and did not resist.

" Stephen. Supposing some one sees us at the theatre."

" Who should ? "

" I don't know. Jim's at home, of course, but there might be friends there."

" I have no friends. And you can't have many in England."

" No. It will be all right."

" It will be perfectly all right. Come and be happy."

" Let's move. I'm beginning to feel cold. And we've a long way to walk if we're to reach that train to town."

He did not release her hand as they rose ; and they walked down the quiet roads, swinging their linked hands, in an effort to hide emotion beneath frivolity. The sun dropped in the sky, throwing over the country a glamorous light that spoke to both of closer linking.

" I'm getting tired," sighed Dorothea.

Stephen put his arm at her waist as if to aid her in her walk. But a few paces more and he was holding her tight against him. She looked up at him, smiling an inquiry into the correctness of this, and he kissed her cheek.

" Stephen ! " she protested—but no more.

Pausing in the empty road, he embraced her as he had longed to do, kissing her mouth ; and she, at the touch of his lips, flung her arms about his neck and held his face on hers. Then they walked a little way, in the guilty silence of those who have yielded, but the embrace was too sweet not to repeat, and Stephen took her to him again, kissing her almost reverently. But her welcome, her permission behind closed eyes, fired his love, and he whispered, " I love you only, dearest—I can't help it. I seem to have waited for you all my life, and you have come. And I shall never, never see you again. You will have gone home when I come back. . . . But I shall

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remember that you kissed me once till the end of my days. . . . It's been worth living for, this minute. . . . Kiss me again, my dearest."

She kissed him, murmuring, "I love you . . . I love you."

"Oh, have you said that, dearest? Have you said it, in spite of all? What a gift to me to take away!"

"I love you. I love you only," she repeated, behind the closed eyes of one who is conquered.

They broke apart, and walked on with linked hands; but the draught they had sipped was clamant in memory, and at almost rhythmic periods they paused in their walking that they might feel again for the depths of its ecstasy.

Years before Mr. Gallimore had said, "It's wonderful to be going steadily west"; and though he had but little idea of what he meant, to his son the phrase "going steadily west," had always stood for reaching further and further into happiness. Let us accept his interpretation, and state simply that this hour with Dorothea in the country lane, while the sun fell and touched the horizon, was the furthest west to which Stephen Gallimore carried his flag.

### III

I can think of nothing that would make us bow in quite such hopeless worship before the mystery of life, as a vision, could it be granted us, of all the incidents and their play of emotions that were contemporaneous, the world over, within the compass of a single given hour. In this hour of Stephen's dalliance, for example, between the first of his kisses on Dorothea's lips and his last, take but a handful of the acts that were done and the emotions that played over them. As I imagine them, my pickings from that billion-wide mass of diverse movements are as follows: a German submarine puts out from its base on the Belgian coast and dives quickly, its skipper wonder-



ing if he will ever return to the woman he has lately kissed, and doubting bravely, since his orders bid him prowl off Devonport in wait for the English transports that are to leave on Friday ; a coded message describing his departure flashes to the English Admiralty, and there is glee in the heart of the British " agent " who has brought off this coup ; the message is decoded on one side of Whitehall in London (as the German sits down to his charts and Stephen takes a second kiss) and its intelligence is transmitted across the pedestrians, the buses, the cabs and the cars of that streaming road, to a room in the War Office ; among the grey eyebrows and grey beards of the Admiralty there is frowning and consultation, mixed secretly with a boyish delight in the alarums of the great game ; they stand up to go, these brisk men, after a rapid decision that the transports shall leave on Wednesday midnight and put out into the Atlantic, and in their hidden hearts they are proud of their military promptness, these grey captains ; the decision, instantly put into force, acts like a lever which, with one movement, changes the gearing of a thousand wheels and sets a vast machine running to different ends ; the gears change at Devonport Docks, Paddington Station, Waterloo Station, and Brigade Headquarters in Graydon Camp ; a runner carries the Priority Message from Brigade to the Orderly Room of Stephen's Colonel—" Passed for your information and immediate action, please " ; the Colonel swears a hearty oath, and tossing the message aside, says to the Adjutant, " We shall have to recall all those officers from leave " ; half a minute later a battalion runner is carrying to the telegraph office a priority message addressed to " Lieut. Gallimore, 17 English Road, Bealing," and Stephen, as the loveliest walk in his life draws to its inevitable close, is taking the last and longest kiss of all.

I do not know whether all these things happened *exactly* between Stephen's first and last kiss, but, anyhow,

that doesn't affect the moral, and as a nice approximation it seems as good as any, for the priority message, going rapidly to Bealing Post Office, was pencilled as arriving there at 6.58, which was thirteen minutes after Stephen and Dorothea got into the train for London. At 7.10 a telegraph boy hurried up Florrie's steps, and gave the knocker such a bang as he only accorded to military telegrams. For this child had his make-believe and his self-dramatization, and his delight in the scope provided for such exercises by a great war, every bit as much as Mr. Gallimore, or Stephen, or the grey captains of the Admiralty; and as he carried these priority wires, he was no telegraph messenger in a blue uniform, but a gentleman dispatch-rider in khaki rushing through a bombardment to bring up reinforcements to a breaking line; he was already wounded in arm and thigh and there was blood on his brow; but he reached his goal, roused the sleeping headquarters, and delivered his dispatch into the hands of the General himself, who was Florrie, wiping her hands on her apron.

"Lieutenant Gallimore?" inquired the dispatch-rider, smartly.

"But he's not here," the lady submitted. "He's at his camp."

"*Er?*" said the boy stupidly, this reception being no part of his story. He looked at the envelope and recovered. "This here's a military message. It's the War Office."

"Is it?"

"Sure to be. It's Privileged, you see." The boy loved these phrases, as we all do.

"I suppose I'd better open it?"

"Are you his wife, mum?"

"Yes."

"Then'a course you better open it. He's wanted urgently somewhere."

The lady broke the envelope rather nervously, which



didn't spoil the drama at all, and read, her brows crumpling.

"But I can't understand this," she said. "Mr. Gallimore is not here. It's months since he was here."

The boy, delighted to have his advice sought by a woman in her helplessness, looked over her arm and read the telegram, "ALL LEAVE CANCELLED REPORT TONIGHT."

"Yes, I told yer so. It's the War Office. That means his leave is stopped and he must git back at once."

"Of course it does."

"It probably means he's on his last leave before he goes to the front. And there's been a big fight somewhere and they want reserves so he's gotta git back."

"But he's my husband. He'd be here if he were on his last leave. He must have said he was coming home if they wired here."

"And he *hasn't* come home?"

"No."

"Well, you'd better find him, mum. That there's urgent."

"How can I find him in a place like London?"

"Can you think where he's likely to git to?"

"He might be saying good-bye to his mother."

This affecting idea seemed exactly right to the boy, who voted for it at once.

"That's where he is, you bet. He's sure to be either with his mother or his missus at a time like this." So spoke the innocent child. "There'll be no answer, I suppose?"

"An answer?" The lady gave him a bewildered look, and another to the telegram in her hand. "No, I'd better not send an answer yet. I'd better try to find him."

"Right y'are, miss."

And the dispatch-rider walked off with his wounds to hospital, glowing with the promise the general had

given him of a recommendation for gallantry. He refused the offer of a ride in the ambulance, declaring that the need of the other poor fellows was greater than his. One of the "Walking Wounded," he limped along English Road, his hand pressed at times to the burning wound in his thigh.

## IV

Mr. Gallimore dropped his evening paper on the sound of the hall-door bell, and since Ruth was in the kitchen, rose heavily to open to the visitor.

"Hey, Florrie?"

"Is Stephen here?"

"Stephen? No."

"Oh . . . I made sure he'd be here. I made sure he'd be here."

Mr. Gallimore, hearing pain in her voice, was sharpened to see that she must have come in a haste, for her apron was visible under her overcoat.

"What's happened, Florrie?"

"There's been an urgent wire for him. And he's not at home. May I come in?"

"Wire!" The thrilling word delighted Mr. Gallimore: here was a call to them for action. "Yes, yes, come in. Tell us all about it."

Ruth hurried from the kitchen and joined them, while Mr. Gallimore, with excited fingers, put on his glasses and read the telegram: "ALL LEAVE CANCELLED REPORT TO-NIGHT." This was splendid; it was war.

"And you say he's not at home?"

Florrie shook her head.

"Well, we must get in touch with him at once."

"That's easier said than done," commented Ruth.

"Of course it's easier said than done. Most things are easier said than done. Beating the Germans is easier said than done. But we've got to do it somehow. We must—we must think this out. First"—a certain famous



detective of his reading hovered in his mind—"first we must eliminate the obvious possibilities. Where might he be if not with Florrie?"

"Perhaps he's at the Harlows," Florrie suggested sadly. "He went there before."

"That's it!"

Mr. Gallimore stood up, folded the telegram, and put it in his pocket. The captains at the Admiralty had not been more prompt.

"That's our first step. We'll 'phone there at once."

"Do we know their number?" objected Mrs. Gallimore.

"I can find it out."

"But supper's just coming in."

"War waits for no one's supper. This is urgent." He took down his hat and coat. "Better come too, Florrie, in case he's not there."

Mr. Gallimore picked up the lantern by which in those days, when all lamps were out in the streets for fear of the enemy in the sky, the householders would light themselves to their friends' houses, their churches, or their cinemas. He put a match to it and led the way into the deepening dusk. The nearest telephone that he could think of in his excitement was the one he had often seen in a narrow passage of the Shepherds' Inn. The landlord, not a little impressed by the visitor's urgency, readily placed his telephone at the nation's service, but Mr. Gallimore insisted that he must pay all charges and felt inwardly proud that he was devoting his coppers to the prosecution of the war. This was the altercation over the wires, from its beginning to its end.

"Number, please?" came the thin little voice.

"I've got a wire here of military importance, and——"

"Number, please?"

"I don't know. I was going to ask you if you would——"

"Number, please?"

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"I . . . do . . . not . . . know . . . it. I wanted to ask you if you would, as this wire is of military importance——"

"What number do you want?"

"No number. It would be best if you would put me straight through to Beddoes, Sussex—or the nearest telephone exchange——"

"Number, please?"

"Oh d—— What's the telephone exchange for Beddoes, Sussex?"

"One minute. I'll find out for you. . . . Wayman's Green."

"Put me through. Urgently if possible. Military importance."

Air—distant voices—the sound in a shell.

"You're through."

"Oh, thank you. Thank you very much. It is very kind of you."

"What did you say?"

"I only said, 'Thank you very much.' I'm sorry to have troubled you. But it was urgent."

"What number, please?"

"Oh, it's Wayman's Green speaking, is it? I'm sorry. Your voice was just like the other telephone girl's——"

"Number, please."

"*I don't know.* But it's the Harlows of Woolands, Beddoes. Please put me through to them. It is urgent Military importance."

"Who's speaking. Is it the War Office?"

"Yes, yes. Certainly. And please be quick. (*Aside.*) That's good, Florrie; they think I'm the War Office. . . ."

"Hello! Who is it speaking?"

"Is that Mrs. Harlow?"

"Yes."

"Oh, I'm Mr. Gallimore. At least, I'm Mr. Gallimore's father."

"Mr. Gallimore?"



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"Yes. Is he staying with you?"

"No."

"Oh well, I'm sorry. We've got a wire that he's to return at once, and can't find him."

"Yes, Jim's got the same wire too. Perhaps he can help you. Shall I fetch him?"

"Thank you very much. . . . She's gone to fetch her son, Florrie."

"Hello! Are you there? Harlow speaking."

"Yes. Mr. Gallimore speaking. Have you any idea where Stephen is?"

"He said he was going to his wife's. Or at least I understood so."

"But he hasn't arrived. Can he have had an accident?"

"I hope not."

"Is it a last leave before you go abroad?"

"Hush, hush! We're not allowed to discuss military movements over the 'phone."

"Oh, of course not. Of course not." (Mr. Gallimore was delighted.) "Foolish of me. But *if* that were the case, he'd have been sure to come home, wouldn't he?"

"Wait—he said he was going to the theatre. He bought two stalls."

"Ah! What theatre?"

"His Majesty's."

"Excellent! thanks; we'll try the theatre. Good-bye."

"Good luck!"

He hung up the receiver, and found he was not in a wealthy Sussex hall, but in the narrow passage of a Bealing inn.

"There's some idea that he's at His Majesty's Theatre, Florrie. They're all having their last leave. He couldn't tell me more, because they mustn't give military information over the 'phone. Naturally, with spies tapping the wires everywhere."

"At the theatre? Oh, he can't be. He must have meant to come home. His last leave!"

"He seems to have said he was coming home."

"There's been an accident."

"No, no, my dear. What accident could there be? We'll find him as right as rain." He picked up the lantern. "I'll hurry to the theatre and see."

"I'm coming with you. Otherwise I shan't be able to stand the suspense."

"Come along then. Come along."

They passed into the road, and he decided that his proper part was to take a taxi; it would be expensive but this was a military matter, and all citizens must be prepared to spend their last shillings in the service of the war. Besides, a train was beneath the dignity of the alarm. "Hey, you!" A taxi was passing, and he stopped it with his lifted lantern. "Pop in, Florrie . . . His Majesty's Theatre. And please be as quick as possible. It's a War Office message." In the taxi, as it purled through the lampless streets, overtaking omnibuses or being held up by traffic blocks, he stared impatiently out of the window, extraordinarily pleased with his part. They were hot on the trail; it would be a triumph to report to his wife, if his acumen drove him straight to Stephen, through the heart of London's millions. Having no time to question Florrie's thoughts, as she gazed out of the other window, he did not guess that she was fighting down her hope that it might prove to be some slight, some very slight, accident which had kept Stephen from coming home; he did not know that she was driving it down with the words, "No, whatever happens, I hope he's safe."

At the box office he bent his head to the window and poured into the privacy of a smart gentleman and a lady clerk a rather voluminous stream of apologies, explanations, and anticipatory gratitude, in the midst of which the smart gentleman, having isolated the main point, turned to the lady clerk and asked, "D'you know anything about it?"



"It's very urgent," repeated Mr. Gallimore. "I should be immensely obliged. . . . This is the telegram."

The lady clerk remembered the name well, she said. A booking of three days ago.

"Stalls, they were," gushed Mr. Gallimore. "His friend, who's in the same regiment, told me so. I've just 'phoned to him. He's received the same wire. So sorry to give you all this trouble. It's their last leave."

"Can we trace which numbers they were?" asked the smart gentleman of the lady clerk, to whom, with less of interest than resignation, he addressed his remarks.

"Perhaps it would save you trouble if I went through to see if he's in the stalls," suggested Mr. Gallimore. "It would save time too. And it's evidently urgent, as you see by the telegram."

The smart gentleman agreed, and soon a commissioner was guiding Mr. Gallimore down the wide stairway towards the auditorium, which veiled, as they approached, the sound of an orchestra and full chorus. Passing into the darkness of the stalls, Mr. Gallimore saw nothing at first except the dazzle of the stage. "Your ticket, sir?" A programme girl was whispering to him. "What?" whispered he. "Your ticket, please?" "No, I'm looking for some one. It's a military message." The girl remained confused.

By now his eyes had adjusted themselves to the darkness, and finding that he was standing low down near the orchestra, he walked up to the pit rails and stood behind the last row. His eyes began their search. Every couple in that dense multitude seemed a khaki officer and a jewelled lady: did any of these heads resemble Stephen's? To a cursory examination, no. Then let him begin at the front row and comb out the place, line by line. He craned his neck and let his glance hover for a second on each head, and then lifted it and passed it on to the next; with a curious feeling, as he nodded thus from halt to halt, that he was dotting a series of "i's."

And Stephen, though neither he nor his father knew it, was barely six paces away. For some time he had been sitting there, sunk in the rapture of Dorothea's nearness, her hand between both of his; heeding only fragments of those dazzling, voluptuous scenes that for so many years (let me explain to you, you who were children then) were the chosen compensation of the soldier-on-leave for the filth and solitudes and woman-hunger of war. He had inclined towards her shoulder that he might the better breathe her nearness. Perhaps the glamour and the voluptuousness had made him seek it the more. His upper arm was touching hers; and what sweetness, if that touch were momentarily lost, to feel her seeking for it again.

With a heart-jump he felt a hand touching him from behind and heard a voice whisper:

"Stephen."

His father in an overcoat bending over him: was he dreaming this?

"Yes, what is it?" The reply was mechanical.

Dorothea had started away from him, and was turning to look at the strange visitant from the darkness.

"Come out if you can. I have an important message. It's a military message."

Stephen clambered up, trying to order his wits.

"Wait there a minute, Dorothea. I'm wanted."

Without further explanation he clambered past the three intervening pairs of knees, which retired from his passage like sensitive plants, and found himself standing with his father in the light beyond the doors.

"What on earth's happened? How on earth did you get here?"

"It's this telegram. I 'phoned to the Harlows, and they told me you were here."

Stephen read the telegram.



"Good gracious! . . . Well, I must beat it at once, I suppose."

"It says, 'Report to-night,' you see. I'm glad I found you."

"I've got a friend in there," stuttered Stephen, blushing. "I'd better go back and tell her."

"Stephen——"

"Yes?"

"Florrie's here."

"Here! Where do you mean?"

"Along there in the vestibule. She was afraid some accident had happened to you."

"*Florrie*? What in heaven's mercy did she want to come for? Accident! What piffle! Anyone would think I wanted a wet nurse."

Indignant talking, behind which to determine on his course. Dorothea in the auditorium, Florrie in the vestibule, himself and his father in the passage—well, Florrie must not see Dorothea; that was one clear point, at any rate.

"I'd better come and see Florrie."

This was his mistake. If only—how often he was to think this afterwards!—if only he had first gone back and explained to Dorothea! But he followed his father to the vestibule, making an opportunity to say, "Father, you'd better not mention my friend inside. I'll explain to you when possible. It's quite all right."

"Of course it is. Of course it is, Stephen."

And Stephen saw that his father was playing the part of a parent who would always believe in his son.

"But Florrie might not understand. There's no time for explanations now."

There was Florrie, standing in the vestibule: Florrie in an old coat thrown over her working clothes; her hair untidy and her eyes darkened with trouble. He took two stabs as he saw her: one of pity for this little deserted Florrie and one of shame in her appearance.

"Well, Florrie?" He went towards her laughing. "I'm sorry if I've given you a fright. Why couldn't you have trusted me to take care of myself?"

"I thought you must have meant to come home."

Pity—an aching pity—seemed to justify lies.

"So I was, dear. After the show. But I thought I'd get the theatre in first. It was all very quick and unexpected; no time to let you know, or anything."

"But you had time to order your seats three days ago."

His eyes turned away. "But that was tentative. If I didn't use them, another officer was going to. I got them on the off-chance. I hadn't time to fetch you, dear——"

He stopped, for he saw with a sudden horrid sinking that Florrie was now staring, not at him, but at some one just behind him. And in the same second he swung round to Dorothea's voice.

"What is it, Stephen? What has happened?"

Well . . . There they were, thought his stunned mind: there they all were, staring at each other. Nothing to be done, or said. Dorothea . . . Florrie, untidy in her old coat and hat . . . his father, empty of speech. It was the end of everything. "Oh, I give it up," thought he. "I give it up."

"This is my wife and my father, Dorothea . . . Florrie, this is Miss Keller, a great friend of mine."

Florrie bowed, naturally and without sarcasm. Her brain, moving quicker and truer than any of theirs, had shaped no picture of theatrical sarcasm, but was busy with one of rescue. If the subsoil of her mind was pain and confusion, its surface was a compelling pity for these two in their unspeakable discomfort. First, before all things, she must save their faces.

"We've been awfully silly," she laughed brightly (and I dare say the acting on the stage, just then, was no better than Florrie's in the vestibule). "We quite thought something must have happened to Stephen. You know



what wives and parents are, don't you? Stephen, you haven't shown Miss—your friend the telegram. That'll help to excuse us, I hope. Show it to her, do."

Stephen handed the telegram to Dorothea, who scanned and returned it. She had instantly guessed all Florrie's thoughts, and filling, not only with gratitude but with pity, played up to her lead.

"I think it was awfully clever of you to find him," she laughed. "I'm so glad you did—I've always wanted to meet you. And now I shall have to give him up to you, I suppose. That's only right."

"It looks as if I had better move at once," muttered Stephen.

"Yes. And thank you so much for taking me to the theatre. I tell you what, I'll go quietly back and sit in my seat for a while, and then go home. . . . Good-bye."

"Good-bye . . . Dorothea." He refused to be ashamed of her name.

"And all good luck, of course. All good luck."

"Look here, I'll write to you, Dorothea. I'll write to you sometimes."

"Of course you will. I insist upon that. And now I'll get me quietly back to my seat. Good-bye and good luck. And thank you again a thousand times."

With a smile for Florrie and Mr. Gallimore she moved down the stairs. Had you seen her quiet her step when she was out of sight, and droop as she walked back to the auditorium; had you seen her hesitate by the auditorium doors and then suddenly plunge into that welcome darkness, where her lips might shake unseen and her eyes brim, you would have felt for her, as I do, nothing but mercy. The seat was empty beside her. And the word "Gone" would leap up ever and again, and shake her heart. "Gone. Never to be seen again."

## VI

"I can go to the station at once," said Stephen, gazing away from his wife. "I've only a hat and a haversack here."

"We'll come and see you off," murmured Florrie.

"Yes, do . . ." murmured Stephen, from his deadened heart, ". . . thanks."

He got his cap, British Warm, and haversack, and put them into the taxi summoned by the commissionaire. For the first part of the journey, husband, wife and father were all silent. Stephen spoke first.

"I'll explain it all to you, Florrie."

"It's all right, Stephen."

"I met her at Jim's. She's been a wonderful little friend."

"I'm sure she has. Don't worry about it."

Then silence again; for the machinery of Stephen's thinking was broken, its parts, as they moved, violating one another. His heart was missing its beats as it remembered that Dorothea was lost for ever, and it was beating with an intolerable pity for his wife. And Florrie, busy upon her work of rescue, saw that she must keep him talking naturally.

"I suppose this means you will be starting to-morrow."

"Yes. I dare say we shall entrain to-night."

"Is it the East?"

"Mesopotamia."

"It'll be a long journey, won't it?"

"Many weeks."

"I suppose you'll be gone several years?"

"The Colonel says so."

"And you'll get no leave—to come and see us sometimes?"

"Only to Ceylon, and places like that."

"I am glad I found you, so as to be able to say good-bye."



## ORDERS

“ So am I——”

One could just endure it. It would be over soon ; when the train carried one away from it, and the bustling camp hid it, and the friendly ship put seas and mountains between oneself and this aching patch of memory.





PART IV

*THE COMPLETENESS OF THE  
VICTORY*





## CHAPTER I

### *Too Far to the Right*

#### I

NOW it is with my story as it was with the life of Stephen and his kind ; it emerges from the narrow streets and their narrow domesticities into the wide-stretching spaces, the colour, and the great occasions of Active War. This quick brief opening for young Stephen, a late Gallimore scion, has always appealed to me. It is like the unexpected bursting of a large flower on the tired old Gallimore tree that, up till now, has seemed but wood and thorns and peeping leaves ; which pleasant idea I confess I got from Mr. Gallimore. " The old tree blossomed," he said. " Yes, she put forth a bloom at the last."

It was the autumn of 1917 when Stephen arrived in Mesopotamia. He had left the slate roofs of Devonport behind him in a grey mist ; he had pushed out into the Atlantic, which, so empty it was, appeared like a suspect sea ; and the first land he had touched was the red soil and monkey woods of Freetown, Sierra Leone. Then the naked negroes had paddled in canoes about his ship ; and ashore the fat negresses in their cotton prints had grinned him a welcome, and the British residents, in topees, khaki shorts, gaiters and sunshades, had led him to an honourable lunch in a veranda'd club. He had crossed the Equator and steamed into Cape Town, while the white cloud, like a tablecloth, hung in folds down the sides of Table Mountain. He had rounded the Cape of Good Hope and been festively welcomed by the most loving city in the world, Durban. After an unaccount-

able and wholly delightful delay in this gracious place, he had crossed the Indian Ocean and made the harbour of Bombay, through a still sea spotted with the sails of yachts. There had been more delay here, praise God, so that he could drive out to the Indian countryside, drift about the landlocked harbour, dine at the Yacht Club, and curse the monsoon. Then he had embarked on his ship for the Persian Gulf, and the gate of Mesopotamia.

And all the while he watched these things he was dreaming of Dorothea. He could not steam towards a lovely coast or stand in a picturesque or legendary place without wishing that she was at his side, or at least that she in England could picture him where he stood. But he must not write and describe his journeyings ; he must never write to her again ; she had sent to him to say so. One night when the ship was against its quay at Cape Town, while, under the stars, the lighted city lay at the foot of Table Mountain, like Naples at the foot of Vesuvius, he had read again the letter in which she gave him her final good-bye. He used in such moments as these to take it away and read it in solitude, because he almost loved the heartache its words could stir. " My dear, we were foolish, and though we did not desire to be cruel, we ended, I am sure, by hurting some one. Stephen dear, you know I could have loved you—I told you so, and what would have been the use of hiding so obvious a thing ?—but I have learned now the truth of what you used to tell me your mother said, that there are happier things in life than one's own happiness. So good-bye, dear ; you will never see me again, nor must you write to me. I believe I am to be able to get back to Germany almost directly. Do not answer this : it may not find me here. Stephen, thank you for having liked me. I cannot help writing that much, because it has meant such a lot to me."

Among his fellow-officers, in these months of travel, he was either silent or jocose. They did not know that



when, at the end of the day, he was alone in his cabin or his tent he was turning his thoughts to Dorothea, and wondering if, by hard concentration, he could make her feel he was thinking of her. "Oh, Dorothea, it is eleven o'clock, and you will be going to your room. Distracting noises will have stopped, and you will have leisure and silence to stand at your window and think of me. Do you catch my thoughts? Are we in touch? Dorothea—it is useless; one cannot lie about the truth: I am very fond of little Florrie, and I admire her goodness, but I love only you."

## II

The Persian Gulf was narrowing into the Shatt-el-Arab, the estuary of the Tigris and the Euphrates. It was the gate of Mesopotamia.

"We seem to be getting in," said Jim Harlow, who was at his side, on the ship.

"I wonder if we shall ever get out," said Stephen.

On one of the banks they were passing was a little Arab village of mud huts and on the other a Sheik's palace among the date-palm groves. Jim looked long at this, and rather tenderly, for a man could but wonder, he said, where the harem was kept. Stephen was more interested in the slow steering of the ship round two masts and a rusty funnel that were sticking out of the water: it was the vessel which the Turks had sunk in the fairway to block the river.

"They don't do these things well," sighed he, as their ship moved easily round the masts and left them astern.

Now were quays and a swarm of square houses on the river's brink to stare at the comings and goings of ships: it was Basra. The regiment disembarked and marched up its narrow streets, Stephen walking by Jim's side and identifying for him Rachel and Esther and Vashti and Rahab and Jezebel, and—with less interest—Nebuchadnezzar and Elijah and Ahasuerus; he could recognize

them easily, he said, from the pictures in his school Bible. Here, for example, was Balaam and his donkey, beyond a shadow of doubt.

At Basra they were held up for many days, awaiting the steamer that should take them up the Tigris River to Bagdad. Most of their spare time they spent floating about the river or up the creeks in the quaint Arab bellems, Belshazzar paddling at the stern (Stephen recognized him at once) and Abraham in the bows. They visited the big white hospitals on the waterside and drank tea with the nurses, and agreed that there were worse ways of spending a war.

D Company was the first to embark on its seven-day trip up the Tigris. Their kit and baggage were placed on bullock wagons driven by turbaned Indians, and the column of men marched independently to the quays. Here awaited them a large, shallow-draught, flat-bottomed paddle steamer, with a huge barge lashed to her either side, on to which the Transport Officer and his men encouraged the mules of the company, tethering them in lines, with a blasphemy or two.

"Apparently she travels up-stream with a barge of mules under each arm," said Stephen.

"Which seems a dam-silly thing to do, with the current against her," said Jim.

But they were new to Tigris travel. The boat had not been chuffing a mile up-stream before they understood the use of the barges. So strong was the downward current that she could only make headway by zig-zagging from bank to bank and hitting each bank (as Jim said) "a hell of a crash." The barges, between which she was sandwiched, took the shock and saved the paddles from destruction. They spent the day watching the protests of the mules as they were hurtled on top of each other by the successive crashes. At each awful jerk the mules would kick all their brethren within reach, amid screaming laughter from the soldiers on the rails.



"It's fun," said Jim.

"They're a bit indiscriminate with their indignation," suggested Stephen.

"They get that from whichever of their parents was an ass."

"Yes, these *mésalliances* are always hard on the children," mused Stephen.

Wherein he was not really being witty; for he was but refining the humour of the soldiers on the rails, who were showing their delight in the mules by calling them balmy bastards. And soon the jest palled; as all things pall on Iraq's wastes—level, stark and empty.

Day after day the ship wound in and out with the sinuous course of the river. Mesopotamia seemed an endless, endless desert of dry mud, with a mud-coloured river meandering a drunkard's course through it; and it was not to be wondered at, suggested Stephen, that the Jews, in their exile here, sat down and wept when they remembered Zion. So monotonous was the eternal flat desolation that they were lifted to excitement when one day they suddenly saw a camel in the distance and, another morning, espied for the first time the snowcaps of the Persian mountains. Thereafter the snowcaps followed them. Occasionally they were stimulated by passing a village of mud huts or a colony of palm-branch bivouacs, when the Arab children and their mothers would run alongside to catch the boat as it bumped, and to sell eggs and beads and rings. Sometimes they tossed their commodities aboard, but before the answering coins could be thrown to them, the boat would be crossing for its bump on the other bank; they then ran screaming to the site of the next rendezvous. Among these people Stephen recognized Hagar and Ishmael quite easily.

Meanwhile Jim, who was always a sportsman with a hand for a gun and an eye for game, had invented a fine sport to outwit the tedium of the days. Hidden

behind a tarpaulin with a pop-gun and slugs, he would pot at the little naked Arab boys, aiming at their roundest part. He was an excellent shot, and the little Arab boys, running along, would leap into the air, wondering what exactly had happened and clapping their little brown hands to their little brown buttocks.

"It's fun," said he.

During the nights they either travelled up a great white shaft of light thrown by the ship's searchlight or, when the stream narrowed, moored inshore to give right-of-way to the rapid down-current traffic.

The monotony of it all dulled their appreciation ; and they could feel no thrills as they approached Ctesiphon and saw its famous arch black against the morning sky. For them this Ctesiphon, though during six hundred years it had been the capital of Mesopotamia, was nothing more than the desolation they saw : a ruined arch, a sacred mosque, a wilderness and three Arabs. The mosque, said the skipper, was one of the three most sacred places in the Mohammedan world, being the tomb of the Prophet's barber ; but they were unenthusiastic. Stephen rose from his languor only enough to identify the three Arabs, who were, he pronounced, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego.

### III

So on the seventh day Mr. Gallimore's son reached a fairy city, Bagdad of the Arabian Nights : blue domes, blue minarets, many-windowed palaces, villas, gardens and hovels ; a city staring down at its idealized reflection in the water, as it might be Mr. Gallimore himself, dreaming of all that he would like to be.

They disembarked at a camp this side of the city ; and, when leave allowed, spent long days in its bazaars, buying lace, camel-bells, daggers, kalam-kars, and identifying the salesmen as, beyond question, the descendants of the Forty Thieves. Once they went to Kazimain to see the



famous mosque, travelling in a pantomime tram to whose roof they climbed by a ladder ; and on the way there they passed the tomb of a famous princess, one of the three most sacred places in the Mohammedan world. They walked round the famous mosque, admiring its domes and minarets, all overlaid with Persian gold, and its great gates a-dazzle with blue tiles. It was a glorious building, but so it should be, for it was one of the three most sacred places in the Mohammedan world.

After a delay of many weeks, during which the Brigade concentrated, the 9th Birmingham were huddled into cattle trucks that stood in Bagdad Station, and dragged by a German engine through the far-stretching desert of mud ; on and on, for hours and hours, the desert on the left being bounded only by the horizon, and on the right by the pale wraith of the Persian mountains. Just before nightfall the train stopped at what could only be the very centre of the Arabian desert, and the Railway Transport Officer, who had travelled on the engine, told them that they had arrived.

"But there's nowhere to arrive at," objected Stephen, looking round. "This isn't anywhere, is it, Jim?"

Jim said he guessed it was one of the three most sacred places in the Mohammedan world.

Then foot-slogging, foot-slogging, foot-slogging—on and on, till they seemed to have marched a distance greater than that covered by the train. On and on, till Stephen grew nervous lest in the darkness they marched off the map and out of the world. "If we go on much further, we shall reach the World War," muttered Jim in alarm. But in the fullness of time, which was at dawn next morning, they found their camp, and lo ! it was a lovable spot, a city of E.P. tents, spread out on the banks of the Diala River. And the Persian mountains were now much closer ; it looked but a day's ride on a swift-footed Arab steed to reach their foothills. The camp was not wholly deserted ; it still had a few residents—quartermasters,

Ordnance Officers, C.C.S. doctors, R.T.O.'s, and others of those who escape the anxieties of war. These residents spoke of it in the highest terms, and expressed their hope that the new-comers would stay long enough to take part in some of its jackal-hunting, pig-sticking, duck-shooting and horse-racing.

## IV

And here for some months Stephen lived with his regiment, doing a little marching or drill during the cool of morning and evening, and lying on a camp bed with a novel during the heat of the day. Near-by were the military ice-factories and soda-water factories, so that he could enjoy again and again the delights of raising a thirst and slaking it with iced and sparkling drinks. Often in the early light of Sunday mornings he would borrow a beautifully-groomed horse, a prancing chestnut gelding, and with the spurs shining at his heels join the jackal hunt—racing over the illimitable flats, jumping the muddy streamlets, shouting “Tally-ho! Tally-ho!” and wishing that Dorothea were galloping on a palfrey at his side. He rode with a straight back and good hands, as if born to it; and many a photograph did he cause to be taken of himself on his chestnut, that he might send them to his father and mother and Florrie. (They can be seen on Mrs. Gallimore’s mantelpiece and in Florrie’s bedroom to-day.)

Of the enemy nothing was seen or heard. People said there was no Turk nearer than Mosul; rumour even affirmed that he was holding race-meetings there and had invited our Staff to attend his races, on condition that he could come to our Bagdad Week. You could borrow the chestnut and ride to the little hills of the Jebel Hamrin and sweep the flat country for heaven knew how many miles, and see nothing but the dome of the sky coming down to meet the circumference of the visible world. Nor did you hear anything. The enormous disc



of the earth and the upturned bowl of the sky enclosed a silence.

"There's no war anywhere," said Jim Harlow, dropping his field-glasses one day when they had ridden out together. "We seem to have missed the Great War, Stephen."

"Perhaps it's over," suggested Stephen.

"It'll be over if we don't go and look for it pretty quick. Years of waiting in England, and now months of waiting here!"

Stephen swept the wilderness again.

"We've gone too far to the right of it, Jim."

"Then it's not a World War at all," grumbled Jim, "or you couldn't get to the right of it. It's a little European fracas—a provincial disturbance."

Stephen had turned his eyes to the right and was looking at the snow hoods of the Persian mountains.

"What is the Hush Hush Brigade doing now?" he suddenly asked.

"Eh?" inquired Jim.

"What is the Hush Hush Brigade doing now? *They* seem to have tracked down some bits of the War."

At the words Jim turned also and looked east that his mind's eye might overleap the snows and roam an imaginary Persia. He nodded knowingly. "Yes, there's things doing in the Blue, there," he said.

"Where have they got to now?"

"It is known to Allah," said Jim.

v

The Hush Hush Brigade in early 1918 was the tasty topic of the mess tables and the talkative groups. All mention of it had been prohibited by special G.R.O.'s, so the Mesopotamian Expeditionary Force discussed little else. Daily they sipped new rumours and drew new inferences, and not one among them, save a few in G.H.Q., Bagdad, knew what he was talking about. Only

one thing was certain : that a dozen or fourteen picked officers and forty men, under a general of fitting picturesque—Dunsterville, from the North-West Frontier—had gone over those Persian mountains with a little fleet of Ford cars and were working their way across the further plateau ; but, as Jim said, none but Allah knew whither or why. Some thought they were going to organize the Armenians into an army; others that they were out-flanking the Amir of Afghanistan ; others that they were seeking the kingdom of Prester John. To-day it was whispered that they had been scuppered by the Kurds ; to-morrow that they had reached Teheran and taken over the government of Persia ; the next day that they had crossed the Caspian Sea and put down the Russian Revolution. Be sure it appealed to Stephen, the thought of that posse of men lost in the Blue beyond the mountains.

“ Is there no means by which a bored subaltern could get to them, Jim ? Couldn’t one get sent as a King’s Messenger ? How did the lucky ones get chosen ? ”

“ They were specially picked from every front in the war. I think they had to be able to speak Armenian and Persian and Russian. Certainly Dunsterville speaks them all.”

“ Well, look here. I know some one in Persia. At Hamadan. Isn’t that enough ? It might be devilish useful, having personal influence over there.”

“ Who is it ? ”

“ She’s a governess, or companion. A woman I met eighteen years ago at Land’s End. Of course I haven’t seen her since, but we were great friends for a week.”

“ She’s probably dead. There’s been massacres and starvations over there.”

“ Well, I think, since I’m here, I ought to be able to go and look for her, alive or dead.”

“ What was her name ? ”

“ Strike me pink, but I’ve forgotten ! Laurie—Laurie Cluer.”



Once again Jim, who had not been attending, looked round the wilderness of Mesopotamia.

"Do you realize, Stephen, that's it's now 1918, and we've not yet seen a shot fired in anger?"

"Yes, I have," corrected Stephen emphatically. "I was in an air-raid in Stepney last year."

And he turned the head of his horse for home.

The chestnut, inhaling the promise of home, pulled for a gallop; hearing hoofs behind, it opened its stride and strained on the rein; feeling its rider yield its mouth, it headed for the horizon, like a greyhound slipped:—Stephen's knees gripped; his breast tightened; his eyes stung; his throat came alight with a tingling, dry exhilaration:—thrilled thoughts (will it be fair to overhear them?) sprang in his mind, jumped from it, and were left behind in the wake of that wanton gallop. All men, galloping, are the children they used to be; and Stephen, in those exultant minutes between Jebel Hamrin and Diala River, thundered down the lists at Ashby-de-la-Zouche, his lance pointed at the crest of his antagonist, to roll the man in the arena's dust; led a charge of his Provençal chivalry into the Saracen array (with his parents and Florrie and little Ruth and Dorothea watching); raced like a dust-drive to recapture the colours the Boers had snatched; rounded off the German guns (this as his horse wheeled round one of the many tumuli that lift like cysts on the plain face of Iraq); and then—as the trees on Diala's fringe came quickly into focus—tore along the tableland of Persia, the foremost horseman of the Flying Column that should relieve the Hush Hush Brigade: which storied Company, entrenched behind Diala's trees, was at exhaustion point and hopeless, as Stephen rode modestly into camp.

## CHAPTER II

### *The Hush Hush Brigade*

THE summer was hot on the plains of Mesopotamia and warfare was therefore still further immobilized when, to the surprised delight of the regiment, came sudden orders to move. Stephen, Jim and Quaite had been out with their men on an "evening fatigue" and, returning to camp, found that unmistakable bustle and chatter which indicates the end of quiescence and the possession of orders to action. Melville, the Captain of D Company, stood at the door of the Mess, and beckoned them in.

"What is it? What's up?" they demanded as, bending their heads, they left the heat of the open air for the cool interior of the tent.

"We're off."

"Where?"

"Persia."

"*Persia?*"

"Yes. The C.O.'s just finished the Officers' Meeting. You missed it."

"Good Lord! Tell us," said Jim. "What's it mean?"

"It means the Hush Hush Brigade, I think."

Jim turned and looked at Stephen. Stephen gasped, and swore it was too good to be true.

"I don't see what else it can be," assured Melville. "We're off in their direction at once."

"Do they want help?" asked Quaite.

"I don't know any more than you. The C.O. told us just enough to get us out of Mesopotamia, and no more."



## THE HUSH HUSH BRIGADE

You know what C.O.'s and Adjutants are when they've secret orders : they like knowing the truth themselves, and not letting the lads know. He told us we were going into the heart of Persia, and probably further. And even that much we were not to tell the men."

"But we can't go further than Persia," objected Jim. "We'd walk into Afghanistan."

"If we went east, yes. But if we went north-west we'd walk into Russia."

"Or if we went due north we'd walk into the Caspian Sea," suggested Quaite.

"Hush, Hush," said Melville. "Don't talk so loud. Hush Hush is the order of the day."

And Jim inquired in a mysterious whisper :

"Why? Is that what we're going to do?"

"Come and look at the map," said Melville, leading them to the mess table.

They crowded at the map's foot, supporting themselves by placing arms on each other's shoulders. Melville ran his finger across the Pushti Khu mountains, the nail making a line at the Pai Taq Pass.

"Are those the mountains we always see?" asked Stephen.

"Yes."

"But shall we have to climb over them?" demanded Jim, sadly.

"Well, we can't go through them. No time to make a tunnel."

"But where *are* the Hush Hush Brigade?"

"It is known to Allah."

"Perhaps we're a search party," said Quaite.

"Perhaps so. But I fancy the Colonel could tell us where they are. *I* don't think they're in Persia at all."

"Where, then?"

Melville put his index finger in the middle of the Caspian Sea, let it stay there for an impressive

second, and then traced it across to the Russian port of Baku.

"There. Or there's where they're trying to get to."

"*Baku?*"

"Hush! Say it low. . . . Yes, my idea is that Dunsterville's objective was never Persia at all, but Russia on the farther side of the Caspian."

"But why?"

Melville didn't answer at once; and Jim, who had been staring at the map, interpolated:

"But it must be six hundred miles at least to *this* side of the Caspian. Some walk! What about our lines of communication?"

"We shan't have any. None to speak of. We shall be a flying column, living on the land."

"Don't the Persians object? They're a neutral country."

"Yes. The Colonel was strong on that. The Persians are cutting up distinctly nasty. They've sentenced Dunsterville and his party to extermination several times already, but he's always managed to bluff or frighten them off. He feeds their starving, and that makes him as popular with the common people as he's detested by the grain speculators. But there's a fellow called Kuchik Khan, a sort of 'Persia-for-the-Persians' man, who's raised all his people against us. He's rather a fine fellow by all accounts; and he attacks our isolated convoys, and snipes us from behind his trees."

"That'll be fun," said Jim.

"But why should Dunsterville want to cross the Caspian?" repeated Stephen.

"That's just my little idea."

"Well, let's have your idea."

Melville again put his finger on Baku, the Russian port on the Caspian. He pressed the place, as if he were pressing it into the map.



"Baku's the reason; unless I'm greatly mistaken, and I'm no fool, as you all agree, don't you?"

Silence; and Melville continued resignedly:

"Well, Baku is chiefly inhabited by Armenians and oil wells. The Turks are approaching it, ten thousand strong, because they want the oil and the blood of the Armenians. They drink the latter, I've always heard."

"Well, let 'em," suggested Quaite.

"Being British, we shan't. We shall go to Baku to help the Armenians in the defence of the town and their wives, and only incidentally to collar the oil. . . . Besides, look here: since the Russian Revolution and the dispersal of the Russian armies who used to hold Persia—which, mark you, is our right flank in Messpot—the whole place has been open to the advance of the Germans and Turks. It's an absolute corridor to India. Well, this is like Gallipoli over again: at Gallipoli we tried to shut the gate at Constantinople; we didn't do it, so now we're going to try and shut it at Baku. Incidentally we get the oil and protect our flank. We haven't any soldiers to spare, so we're going to do it by raising the Armenians in defence of their homes."

"That's damned ingenious," agreed Jim.

"It's damned obvious," improved Melville. "Take all this talk about Kuchik Khan, for instance. His followers are called Jangalis, which simply means 'Jungle Men' and he harasses us from his forest lairs. Well, the only forest country in this part of Persia is down on the Caspian seaboard."

"That settles it, I should think," said Stephen.

"Of course it does, Gallimore," said Melville.

"You're the only one with any sense."

"Perhaps Kuchik Khan has surrounded Dunsterville, and we're a relief force," tried Stephen, to add to this reputation.

Melville shook his head.

"It may be so, but I doubt it. Kuchik Khan's clever, I suppose, but he's not Dunsterville."

And as if that were conclusive, he rolled up the map. Stephen meditated a moment, and then offered suddenly :

"It's a Crusade."

"A *what*?" demanded Melville, genuinely bewildered.

"A Crusade, my boy. Aren't we off to rescue the persecuted Armenian Christians from the Infidel Turk?"

"We're off to collar the oil," objected Melville, in an effort to escape any accusation of nobility.

"And to shut the road to India," added Quaite, equally anxious to elude the stigma of altruism.

"No: you may not like the thought," persisted Stephen. "But it's a Crusade. Just about the same mixture of Quixotry and self-interest as the old Crusades—but still, one of their family."

"Well, anyhow, it'll be fun," accepted Jim, in compensation.

They separated soon after that, to change for dinner. And after dinner Stephen walked out into the cool of the Mesopotamian night, strolling along Diala's banks. A brilliant moon was flooding the sky, and against that expanse of luminous blue he could see, dark and sharply outlined, the long mass of the Pushti Khu mountains.

"God! We're lucky," he muttered to himself.

It had appeared as if, despite the astonishing fulfilment of most of his hopes, he was going to miss the palpitations of battle, after all. The war in these middle months of 1918 had looked like drawing to its close; the Allies had begun to move towards a victory on every front. Unthinkable that peace should come without his having fired a shot! But his luck had not deserted him; it had only been dilatory. Now he was going to what, at this time of day, was far the most romantic corner of the War. And, by heaven! if the opportunity came, he would do heroic deeds; if necessary he would die, doing "meete matter for Trumpet or Tragedie."



Death. It had not much terror for Stephen. Nay, it had almost a beauty. For there was one sorrowful failure in the fulfilment of his dreams. He had dreamed of moving in wealthy and spacious places, of visiting wonderful countries, of riding or marching at the head of his men, of being loved by a beautiful woman, and of doing heroic deeds ; and all these things had come to him, or were coming. But he had dreamed also of being the pattern of chivalry and the soul of honour, and what had he done to Florrie ? How was he going to set that right ?

From one of the lighted messes he could hear a gramophone playing " I shall come home at eventide." The sound dwindled as he walked on, and he was glad, because it saddened him. If he came back from the war and took up the old life again, would he be able to compensate her by his gentleness and his love—he whose nerves were rasped by her presence and whose heart was away with Dorothea ? But, if over there on the Persian plateau, or down on the Caspian seaboard, or across in the Caucasian provinces of Russia, he were given some desperate task to do, where death seemed certain, why then he would write a letter to Florrie, full of thanks for all that she had been to him . . . and she would keep it for ever and be happy . . . and little Ruth would probably be all the better if her father were a gallant memory, and not one whose nagging and discontent were always with her. " She would be brought up by Mother and Florrie, and their influence would be better than mine. Because they are much grander than I am." Yes, death could change this discordant note and bring it into the general harmony. That, or some complete revolution in his nature. And death seemed much the more likely to-night. " I don't think I should mind it," thought he, looking towards the Pushti Khu mountains. " I should have created something at last, and should destroy nothing more."

## CHAPTER III

### *The Column Moves*

#### I

“**A**LL praise to Allah,” said Jim. “On Whom be peace.”

The battalion was standing opposite some twenty or thirty powerful Peerless, Daimler, and Longevity motor-lorries that were going to lift them over the mountains.

“Don’t worry,” said Melville. “They’re only going to take us as far as Hamadan. We’ve got to walk the next few hundred miles.”

“Never mind. I didn’t see myself foot-slogging up those mountains. But can a Longevity lorry climb a mountain?”

“That there engine, sir,” said a driver, who was standing near, “would climb a brick wall.”

The men were packed, twenty-four to a lorry, and when the lading was completed, the C.O.’s lorry took the lead, and the fine carnival procession, singing and cheering, started on the first three hundred miles of its trek. No longer were they the Mesopotamian Expeditionary Force, but Dunsterforce, which was the official title for Dunsterville’s Hush Hush Brigade. They covered seventy miles that day, and before nightfall were at the foot of the mountains. Tumbling from the lorries they gazed up at the great slopes and staring cliff-faces which seemed to rear up suddenly from the plain and finish in razor edges against the sky. On those upper spurs an evening light was resting, and a deep ribbon of sunset red lay on the cliffs. There was green grass under their boots, as they stamped their stiff and aching limbs, and by



## THE COLUMN MOVES

their side a stream from the rocky walls went gossiping through its rushes. Certainly they had crossed a frontier and left on lower levels the empty dust of Mesopotamia.

Next morning the procession filed into a wide cleft between two towering mountain walls. The atmosphere cooled under those sky-high faces, and darkened. It was the entrance to the Pai Taq Pass.

The Pai Taq Pass is the natural and only road from the Mesopotamian plain up to the Persian plateau ; which is to say that it has been a marching line for imperial armies since history and aggression began. Up and down it have marched the armies of Cyrus, Darius, Xerxes, and the Chosroes. The Arabs in the swell of their early conquest marched up it ; and that was more than a thousand years after Cyrus. Hulagu with his Mongol hosts swept down it ; but that was when another six centuries had run. Then, seven centuries later, in 1918, went Dunsterville up it, with his dozen officers, his forty men, and his little fleet of Ford cars.

The old Pai Taq Pass ! The tot of years is mounting again since Dunsterville went up it, and since Stephen's long column of lorries went moiling after him ; and down it to-day, when there is no World War, come mainly the caravans of the merchants seeking the bazaars of Bagdad, or the caravans of the Persian Moslems on their pilgrimage to the shrines of Kerbela and Kazimain. Many of the pious make their last journey down it to-day, and so to rest for ever at Kerbela, near Hussain the Martyr's shrine. They are travelling as The Dead, then—lashed to the backs of mules. War and Peace ; long Peace and War again ; but its eternal sound, under all, is stillness and silence.

When Jim saw the tilt of the road as it began to climb towards the saddle of the pass, he hinted to Stephen, who was sitting with him on the front seat of a Longevity

lorry, that it could only be done on the low gear. Farther on he held that it could not be done at all. But Stephen retorted, "If Cyrus and Darius, and savages like that, could do it, then the 9th Birmingham can. If necessary we'll tow the lorries up."

But the lorries needed no towing. They didn't even discharge their loads. They just toiled up and up, on a road that at times was no more than a shelf along the mountain's shoulder. The whole Mesopotamian plain (or so they thought) could be seen from the shelf; and it looked like a country overwatched from an aeroplane. Higher up it looked like a map. Up the steepest two miles between Pai Taq village and what was called the saddle (though still some miles below the watershed) the lorries did invite the battalion to descend, but they refused to be pushed, and on their own power ground a way to the top. Then a few miles of gentle gradient, and they were dropping on to the high tableland of Persia. All was green: everywhere the poplar grew. By one steep climb they had exchanged the palms of Mesopotamia for the poplars of Persia.

It was a land of famine they passed through now, for the next few days. The villages on a cropless plain were ruined and empty. In the larger towns such as Kermanshah and Kangavar the men, women and children—so far as they could be distinguished from one another in their emaciated condition—lay dying of starvation on streets pestilential with stagnant sewage and waste. In dilapidated and evil-smelling bazaars the provision merchants sold their scanty wares of sour goat's milk, dirty dates, grapes and almonds, over the recumbent bodies of dying and dead. Little fly-blown, derelict babies lay in odd corners where they had been cast out to die. Once a scarecrow of a girl-child, too weak to walk, crawled on her belly to the lights of the British bivouacs and died among the men.

In the empty country between the towns the Eastern



## THE COLUMN MOVES

dogs worried the bones of camels, horses and donkeys ; and sometimes it appeared as if they were playing with human bones.

### II

Running was comparatively easy on the tableland, except, perhaps, for the Assadabad Pass, some 8,000 feet high ( "The table's a bit warped here," said Jim), and on the evening of the fifth day they were running along a road of poplars into the town of Hamadan.

Hamadan ! Stephen stared at the low houses of sundried brick, the faded mosques, and the statelier homes in their poplar gardens. So this was Hamadan. Was it credible that he stood in Hamadan ? Eighteen years ago he had met Laurie Cluer, and she had first mentioned this place, and it had seemed like a place at the world's end. And to-morrow he might walk up to her and say, " Miss Cluer, I believe. We last met on the Cornish sands." Of course she would be here ; the four years of war would have caught and imprisoned all these people in their distant outposts. He felt exceedingly fond of Miss Cluer. Strange how one could suddenly feel a great liking for a forgotten person, just because one was on the point of rediscovering her !

In the morning when he was free, he set off for the house of the British Consul who was, he learned, a local carpet contractor, possibly the very one with whom Miss Cluer had lived. The Consul was away, and a Persian servant, knowing nothing of Miss Cluer, referred him to another carpet merchant, Mr. Kennedy, whose house was but two minutes away, in the British compound. As he entered Mr. Kennedy's garden through wide gates, and passed up the avenue of poplars towards the house, he felt certain that he was walking straight to Miss Cluer. Yes, surely she had described just such a veranda looking down just such a vista of poplars. And this drawing-room into which the Persian servant was show-

ing him, surely she had described its floor thick with carpets, rugs, and praying mats, and its walls hung with them.

Mr. Kennedy, a stout Englishman, entered, and Stephen, with apologies, explained his coming.

"Not at all, not at all," demurred Mr. Kennedy. "Delighted to see you. But Laurie Cluer! Laurie died two years ago."

"Oh! . . ." Stephen had hardly prepared himself for this, and added feebly, "I'm sorry."

"Yes, Laurie died of typhus, which the Russians brought when they marched through. She died in the American Mission Hospital, just over yonder. We were so cut off from most of the world at that time, we could do little for her."

"Oh," repeated Stephen, and was at a loss for further words.

"I am afraid I can show you nothing but her grave," continued Mr. Kennedy, with an apologetic smile.

"Yes, I should like to see that," agreed Stephen.

"Well, come on, then. And afterwards I'll show you some of the sights of Hamadan. There's quite a big British and American colony here now, what with the bank manager and his wife—you must meet them; delightful people!—and the bank clerks, and the American Medicals, and some stray carpet contractors who have hurried here from the less safe parts of Persia. All felt they were safe in Hamadan, when Dunsterville arrived with his forty rifles. Have you met Dunsterville yet? Wonderful man, that! . . ."

Mr. Kennedy rattled on as they walked; and since he was of the loquacious, enthusiastic brand, Stephen asked many questions, hoping to pick up some information about the real objective of the Hush Hush Brigade. He gathered from Mr. Kennedy that among the British and Americans of Persia—always excepting the sulky diplomats at the capital—there was nothing but enthu-



siasm for Dunsterville and disgust at the jealousy and stinginess of General Headquarters, Bagdad.

"Jealousy?" asked Stephen, in surprise.

"Yes, by God," assured Mr. Kennedy. "They hate him, just because he was given a separate command. I could tell you a tale or two! Tales of deliberate hampering and backbiting. Dunsterforce, you're called. Dunster*farce*, they call it down there. They say Dunsterville's a bluffer. So he is, and look what he's done with his bluff! Here was all Persia open to the Germans and the Turks, and he with his twelve officers and forty motor drivers, and a few stray people who came up later when Bagdad would let 'em through, and some odd remnants of the Russian army—damned odd remnants, too!—he's, as you might say, held a thousand miles of line. And how's he done it? Bluff. All the local democrats are crying for his blood, but he's got such a system of Intelligence that he knows all their secrets and all their plots to wipe him out before they know them themselves, and they think he's uncanny and are chary of moving. He bluffs all Persia about the number of men he's got here; they think he's ten times as many as he has. He sends an armoured car here and an aeroplane there, till the Persians see the British Army everywhere. He bluffed the grain speculators into releasing all their hoarded wheat, by faking wires about large supplies from Bagdad. He stole the thunder of the local agitators by feeding the people they left to starve. And he's courtesy, patience and understanding with every one, even those who are plotting his murder. I've never seen him lose his temper. They say he's the original of Kipling's Stalky, but I should hope he was better than that."

"Where's he now?"

"Ah!" Mr. Kennedy became mysterious. "I don't know where he is, but I think I know what he's after. However, I'm not saying anything. It's no good being

a Hush Hush Brigade, if people don't hush-hush about you. But he won't do what he's after. Least, I don't think so. He's gambling on too much. He's gambling on certain people doing their duty, who'll no more do their duty when they hear a shot fired, than a flight of geese. I *know* 'em."

"You mean the Armenians of Baku."

"I mean the Bashi Bazouks of Bokhara, my boy. Anyone you like. But I tell you this"—Mr. Kennedy was plainly one who loved to talk mysteriously of a thing he had vowed not to talk about—"it's a brilliant conception. Whether it's Dunsterville's or the War Office's, it's as brilliant a conception as anything in the war. It's as brilliant as Gallipoli."

"It's almost the same idea as Gallipoli, isn't it?"

"Yes. . . . At least, *p'raps* it is! But it'll have the same end as Gallipoli. I've a fancy the end's in sight now. I don't *know*, of course, but there are ugly rumours about—damned ugly rumours! And this arrival of whole battalions seems to underline those rumours a bit. And it might have been so different if they'd supported Dunsterville properly! *He'd* have brought it off, if any man would. But the whole thing's just like the British. They always send too few for a show, being so cocky of their own powers. Too few first, and then a flying column of relief too late. However, here's the cemetery."

They were passing through a mud wall into the cemetery, and Mr. Kennedy led him to a corner reserved for the British and Americans. He pointed to an English grave. "That's her. Yes, that's poor Laurie."

And Stephen stood by the grave, staring down at it. Poor Miss Cluer! What gay possibilities had looked out of her eyes! And had she really *lived*? As far as he knew, no man had ever loved her. She had just been the paid companion of a lady in a far-away country, seeing during the greater part of her adult life no more



than a dozen English faces. For her there was nothing of the compensating memory that she was "making her pile" against the day of going home. He wondered what thoughts had played behind her wistful eyes in the dusks of evenings, when she walked in the low hills by Hamadan and looked at the mountains that lay between her and England; and what thoughts had filled them with tears, as they looked at the last things they would ever see, the white walls of a room in the American Mission.

"I must write to my father about this," said Stephen at last. "He always liked her."

"Yes," agreed Mr. Kennedy. "Come on then, and see the sights. As I was saying, the whole thing's just like the British. Too few first, and then a flying column of relief too late. Look at Gordon and Khartoum. Look at Ian Hamilton and Gallipoli. Look at Townshend and Kut. And now Dunsterville. Yes, you won't be delayed here long, my lad. They'll rush you to Kasvin as quick as say what-ho! Mark my words."

### III

The event hardly justified his excited words. The battalion was delayed at Hamadan for some days, and when orders came to move, they came with the disappointing information that the men would march on foot for the next hundred and fifty miles to Kasvin. A squadron of Russian Cavalry, remnants of the broken Russian army, would be attached to them, and a large crowd of Jilu refugees. The Jilus, it appeared, were Christians of the Assyrian Church who had been so overcome by a visit of one of Dunsterville's aviators, just when they expected massacre at the hands of the Turks, that they pressed kisses on the young man's face and knees and feet, and straightway marched as a nation to Hamadan, to be fed and clothed and protected by the British. Most were sent down to Bagdad and

cared for there, but some were now to be escorted to Kasvin by the 9th Birminghams.

"It'll be a pretty procession," said the Colonel.

The British and American colony came to the gates of Hamadan and watched the procession march out of the town and up the Russian posting road, till it was out of sight. First went the British battalion. Then the fur-capped Russians, their rifles slung aslant their backs as they rode on their little ponies, three by three. Then the motley herd of Jilu refugees; some afoot, among whom were many stout old ladies and a few martial young women with rifles slung like the Cossacks; some on donkey back, among whom were young mothers with their babies across the pummels; some in carts laden with gaily-coloured mattresses and rugs; and some who were sick, in the lumbering wagon drawn by four ponies abreast and flying a tattered red cross. Lastly went the hundred and sixty camels bearing the kit and provisions of the British unit.

The group of British and Americans, calling "Good-bye. Look out for Kuchik Khan," waved hands and handkerchiefs till the last English soldier was out of sight. This last English soldier was riding to and fro along the string of camels and the straggling lines of the Jilus, as if he alone were shepherding them to their fold; and it was Stephen who, much to his delight, had been made Temporary Quartermaster and Transport Officer and given the charge of the camels and the Christians, and, for the duties withal, a horse. He waved at the road's bend, and disappeared.

Such is the last view we shall have of Stephen for a while: Mr. Gallimore's son riding as he had always longed to ride, away into the Blue, and shepherding his Christians home. I am confident he was kind and patient with them, especially the ladies, old and young.



## CHAPTER IV

### *A Curtain*

#### I

MR. GALLIMORE, some months before, had inherited a small legacy. A cousin of whom he had seen nothing for twenty years had died, leaving his property to be divided among his relatives; and Mr. Gallimore's share had amounted to £515. As when champagne is poured into a glass, he had sparkled with the airiest resolutions: he would make a handsome present to his wife; he would take her for a holiday; he would give young Florrie a whole trousseau of new clothes; he would buy fifty pounds' worth of War Savings Certificates for little Ruth; and yes, in this hour of the country's need, it would be a graceful action to send a mite—say £25—to the Red Cross. For we know by now that Mr. Gallimore had both heart and imagination. But (it remains a fact) one does not spend one's money on others without a preliminary period of hesitation and inner debate; it demands a certain bracing and building and shoring up of the will, and the repulse, at the same time, of a hundred cautionary objections; it is, in fact, very like the story of Nehemiah—we must build our little Jerusalem with the right hand, and with the other fight for the city. Mr. Gallimore was in the middle of this struggle, and emerging, I think, successfully, when he had the ill-luck to meet a friend who suggested Longevity Motors, Ltd.: their shares were certain to rise, the motor trade being an industry that was receiving a great fillip from the war, and the new Longevity four-ton lorry having earned high favour at

Whitehall. It was *the* tip of the hour, said the friend. Mr. Gallimore was interested: wouldn't it be best to have a shot at doubling the money first, and then give the presents? Of course. After long cogitation in his chair, he decided that he was convinced of it. "Yes, I am convinced of it." So rather quickly, as if he were afraid of his generous impulses returning, he bought £500 worth of Longevity shares.

Now a new interest had come into his life: every morning had its little excitement as he opened *The Financial Report* (which, now that he was a financier, he "took") and learned how far his shares had risen. And they *did* rise; not violently, but steadily, like a thermometer as the day warms. This interest was the visitor most often welcomed, entertained and played with in the private chambers of Mr. Gallimore's mind; loving it so dearly, he would lay down his novel to call it back to play; at lectures he would miss much of the address or the discussion, that he might company with his favoured guest; on his walks, he would take it out with him as well as Ruth, to whom, in truth, he hardly spoke, finding his invisible friend the more delightful companion of the two.

One morning, in late September, he came down to breakfast, eager as usual for that little thrilled moment with the *Financial Report*. There were several letters, besides the paper, on his plate. Now Mr. Gallimore, after the manner of children who retain the almond icing till the less exalted parts of their cake have been eaten, always kept the spiciest morsel of his breakfast reading till the end. For fifty years he had begun with the dullest letters and worked through to that one whose handwriting or post-mark promised the greatest pleasure. On this principle, since nowadays the *Financial Report* was the choicest morsel, he always read his letters before coming to the paper. This morning he glanced at the faces of their envelopes. There was, ah yes! a letter from his boy. Good. He gave it a position of honour:



that is to say, he placed it second only to the *Financial Report*. Having scanned the less interesting letters, he cut open Stephen's. Its earlier pages, describing the journey over the mountains, he read aloud to his wife. Then he stopped, and his brows rumped. He muttered something to himself, instantly drawing from Ruth an inquiry as to Stephen's health.

"Oh, good gracious, no! . . . No, it's not that . . . No, it's nothing . . . only the death of a friend Stephen and I met years ago. We haven't seen her for eighteen years."

Nothing! He admired himself for saying that, and showing a brave face to the world. It was English, this reserve; the English didn't show their emotion. Laurie . . . Laurie dead, and in a lonely grave thousands of miles away! This was surely one of the great moments of his life; a moment when one took a stunning blow—took almost a death-sentence; such a moment as plays were made of; and pictures—the pictures, for instance, of the Hon. John Collier. His turbulent thoughts must be concealed under an impassive face. But speak he could not. He sipped his tea, staring dreamily ahead. If his wife offered a remark, he began, "Oh!—ah!—I beg your pardon—what did you say?" like one whose thoughts had been dragged by her voice from far away. Once or twice he had heard quite distinctly what she said, but loyalty to Laurie demanded this duty of remoteness. Laurie dead! And the simple fact of his life was that she had been the woman he had loved. Granted that he was old, and this was a story of long ago, still, he had loved her all these years. Yes, he knew it in this moment. And in order to know it better—for his knowledge was not as steady on its feet as he could wish—he conjured up the picture of Laurie Cluer radiant on the sands of Sennen Cove. Ah, if he thought long on that, his eyes would warm.

Sipping his tea, he saw the unopened *Financial Report*. His hand, putting down the cup, went straight towards

the paper and lifted it. . . . But no! Could he feel interested in Longevity, Ltd., at a moment when he had just heard that the love of his life was dead? He laid it down again, and his fist on top of it, in an action worthy of the theatre. Determined to be loyal to Laurie, he sipped his tea again.

"Laurie . . . Laurie. . . . Where are you now, I wonder?"

One ought to be alone to indulge these thoughts. "Yes," said he to himself, once he saw the necessity of this, "I feel this is a moment when I ought to be alone." But it would provoke his wife's surprise if he got up and walked away, the breakfast unfinished on his plate. "No, I must stay it out. I must stay the course. . . ." So he remained; and a little later, though he told himself it had little interest for him now, he did—for something to do, and for appearance' sake—open the *Financial Report* and see what had happened to Longevity shares. They had risen, and his £500 was now worth £750.

## II

When his wife had cleared away and retired to the kitchen, he sat himself in an arm-chair in a dejected attitude, letting an arm fall till its fingers touched the ground. "Laurie . . ."

It was perhaps unfortunate that he should recently have seen Miss Doris Keane and her partner in that moving play, "Romance," for he detected now an extraordinary parallel between the Bishop and himself; he recalled that last scene in which the Bishop, a handsome man with his white hairs, sat in just such an attitude as this, having heard but a minute before of La Cavallini's death. "She never married," the Bishop had said, shaking his head significantly.

Come to think of it, Laurie had never married. "I wonder . . . I wonder . . . is it possible that she really remembered me all through? That is a thing I shall go



to my grave without knowing. . . . But I was very fond of you, Laurie. . . .”

Ruth entered at this moment to put the spoons and forks back into the sideboard ; and Mr. Gallimore felt as if all his thoughts had been arrested and must stay motionless till this noisy intrusion was over.

But she was gone again, and he could sink back into his thoughts. If by good luck that £500 were to double itself, that would be £1,000 ; fifty pounds a year. But supposing—supposing he could double that again. £2,000—a hundred a year. Somehow, not till you had a hundred a year could you call yourself a man of private means. Two pounds a week would make a considerable difference ; he would be able to allow himself little luxuries ; he would be able to give Ruth—

But Laurie ! Oh yes, the memory of her hurt him. To the old Bishop, as he sat in his chair, dreaming of La Cavallini, she had appeared in a vision—how beautiful Doris Keane had looked in her old-fashioned crinoline ! Mr. Gallimore had felt as near tears as a woman, that night in his Upper Circle seat. Would not Laurie somehow appear to him ? Would it bring her hovering near, if he thought hard of her ?

He half closed his eyes to induce a hypnotic state and increase the chances of a message or a vision. But nothing appeared in the mist except his old-fashioned mahogany sideboard with the cruets reflected in its mirror. And this sideboard, so unlike the massive furniture of the Bishop's library, saddened him as a poor background for a vision. How he would have liked to live with massive furniture ! Surely there had always been something spacious in his mind that ought to have been framed by spacious rooms. But never had he been able to spread himself : he had been cramped . . . cramped. . . . And a hundred a year, even if he succeeded in quadrupling his £500 would make no real difference. It would give him a few little luxuries, but it wouldn't

translate him to the rich, large, dignified life. Of course he might, instead of investing that £2,000, buy an annuity with it, and at his age of sixty-four, it ought to bring in a large sum. No, that wouldn't be fair to Ruth. If he should die first he wasn't going to take the proceeds of that legacy with him. Ruth should enjoy it too—till the end. But wait; couldn't he buy an annuity for the one that lived longest—an annuity on both lives? What annuity would £2,000 buy on two old lives? . . .

Somewhere in the twilight of such happy thoughts was lost and perished Mr. Gallimore's one romance. Lie lightly on it, ye insubstantial dreams.



## CHAPTER V

### *Mr. Bowden is Still Prouder*

#### I

THAT letter of Stephen's arrived in England a month and two weeks after the August day when, by the side of the British and American Colony, we watched him riding out of Hamadan, at the end of a string of pack camels. It was an evening not seven days after the letter that Florrie, working in her kitchen, heard the knock of a telegraph boy. During four years now this sound had been rattling on English doors, for the introduction, to the women within, of a statement of the pain the War had assessed as their share; and almost every house in her long dull road had heard it sooner or later. Wiping her hands on her apron, she went to the door; not quickly but steadily, as one who must face the worst.

Lieutenant Gallimore was missing and believed wounded and a prisoner, stated the telegram.

"Oh! . . ." she exclaimed, and sent the boy away. Perhaps—was it not almost good news? Not dead—just missing and believed a prisoner. The War nearly over, he would be kept in safety and soon released. It didn't even say "*seriously* wounded." Oh, perhaps it was good news. Unable to order her thoughts, she felt she must run to some one; so without removing her apron or straightening her hair, she pulled on a coat and hat and hurried by tram and bus to her mother in the Fulham Road. Not yet could she go to the Gallimores'—not yet. In the first-floor sitting-room, she found her mother seated in the arm-chair to the right of the fire, and her father lying on the sofa with his stockinged

feet addressed to the flames. All his waistcoat buttons, and the upper button of his trousers, were undone ; because it was evening and a time of recuperation.

"Mother. Stephen's missing."

Her hand proffered the telegram.

"Eh ?" inquired her father, suddenly turning himself into a sitting position, and doing up the waistcoat and the trousers, as if such a telegram were a dignified entrant in whose presence it were rude to be unbuttoned.

"Missing ? . . . Crikey ! . . ." His voice was thick, and he cleared it so as to say this last word better. "Crikey !"

Mrs. Bowden read the telegram for a long time ; by the way she was studying it, it might have contained a thousand words instead of a dozen. Florrie came close to look at it too, and the mother put an arm round the daughter's shoulder, and drew her close.

"It may be good news, Florrie. It may be splendid. The War is finishing—every one says that, and he will be kept safe till the end."

"Yes, that's what I think," said Florrie.

"'Ere," called Mr. Bowden, stretching a hand for the telegram. "Chuck it over."

He also looked at it for a long time.

"I don't like it," said he at last. . . . "No," he repeated, after thought, "I don't like it. I'm not going to say I do. Take my words, they are breaking it to you gently." He shook his head despairingly. "I'm afraid this means, Florrie——"

"No, it doesn't," interrupted his wife. "It doesn't mean anything of the sort. It's good news."

"I wish *I* thought so," said her husband musingly.

"Of course it is. Stephen's alive and well. That's all it means."

"I don't think so," maintained Mr. Bowden, staring with deep sorrow at the hearth rug. "I don't think so. . . . No !" It was as if the hearth-rug carried conviction. "Stephen's dead."



"He isn't. He isn't. Don't listen to him, Florrie."

"All right, he *isn't*," Mr. Bowden conceded to the obstinacy of women.

He stood up ; or rather, he made a first effort to stand up, but it achieved inadequate success, and he was obliged, after saying "As you were !" to sit down again, and recommence the movement. This time he concentrated more thought on it, and with the help of the mantelpiece brought it to a stable conclusion.

"Well, I hope you're both right," said he, fumbling for his pipe and matches. "That's all I can say : I hope you're both right. But I repeat, I don't like the look of it at all. And it's a pity as the war's just over. Crool, that's what it is. Crool."

Having lit the pipe with difficulty, he looked at the two women.

"Well, don't give away, Florrie . . . don't give away. . . . It may be all right. . . . Yes, he was a good boy, Stephen, and I was very proud of him. I couldn't have arst a better sunner-law. . . . Well . . ." An attractive idea was shaping in his mind. "Well, perhaps I'd better leave you women to it. I'll go out for a breather. This—this has hit me more than I show."

He walked a slightly zigzag route across the room and out of the door. Down the staircase his hold on the bannister kept him in a straighter line, and this seemed to give him sufficient practice in the art of straight walking and remind his brain how it was done, so that, when he was out on the pavement, he was able to keep as un-deviating a course as most. He reached the Bishop's Arms, and pushed open the door of the Saloon Bar.

The truth was that, while Mr. Bowden had often in the past drawn pride from the existence of Stephen, he had never felt such pride as now when he believed that existence to be closed. He was immensely proud of having a son-in-law who was probably dead. He was immensely proud of the sorrow which was consequently

weighing him down. Never before had he entered the Bishop's Arms quite such a conqueror. The runner from Marathon did not enter Athens with more pleasurable excitement than Mr. Bowden pressed open the door of the Saloon Bar—with bent head.

He sat down on one of the settles, pushed his bowler hat behind his temples, and laid a dejected fist on the table.

"Whisky, miss, please."

No one took much notice of him. Two of his friends who were lounging at the bar nodded; the landlord said, "Hallo, Tommy," and that was all. A man and a woman seated at the table he had chosen, moved up to make room for him, and withdrew again into that far-away land whither draught stout, such as they were engaged on, is apt to send its disciples. They just fingered their glasses, stared ahead, and kept silence.

"Let 'em wait; let 'em wait," reflected Mr. Bowden, cheerfully confident. "They'll take enough notice of me soon."

"Whisky," said the girl, putting it down and moving a jug of water towards him.

"Thanks," murmured he sadly. "Thanks, miss."

He sipped it, and then said to the woman at his elbow: "I need this."

"I beg your pardon?" Her look showed that she was wondering why he had addressed her.

"I need this. I need it to-night, if ever mortal man did."

"Feeling sickish?"

He thought over this; it had disappointed him.

"Not as you mean. Sick at heart, if you like. Sick at heart."

"I'm sorry."

Mr. Bowden's head nodded at the table many times; and the woman's companion, probably her husband, who was quite interested by now, inquired, "Bad news, mate?"



A profound nod, but more oblique than its predecessors, was his answer.

"I'm sorry," said the man. "Serious?" He had advanced his face towards the sufferer, and arranged it into an inquiring look, but as Mr. Bowden offered nothing, he was obliged, in the passage of time, to retire it behind the woman again.

"It's me boy."

Mr. Bowden decided to whisper this confidentially to the woman, and, as he expected, it brought the man's face round again. "Least, not me boy, exactly, but me daughter's boy—her husband. . . ." Feeling that by this concession he had lost honour, he added, "Still, he was like me own child."

"Is he in trouble?"

"Trouble? No, he wasn't the sort as gets into trouble. He was a gentleman, if ever there was one."

"Is he ill?"

"Is he *alive's* more the question."

"Oh dear, I'm sorry."

The man's face advanced still further.

"Killed, mate?"

"I'm afraid so. . . . Yes, I can only think so. . . . Yes, he's dead, mark me words. . . . Anyhow, I wouldn't give you a thank-you for his chances. You see——" and across the woman, he whispered confidentially and knowingly to the man, who would doubtless understand these high state affairs better than a woman—"it's that business in Persia. You remember, the force that marched thousands of miles from Bagdad with Major-General Dunsterforce—picked men, the whole bally lot of 'em. Our Stephen was one of them. We're not supposed to know he was there, of course, but bless me soul, we had it weighed up, where he was—from his letters. He could write a letter, that boy could; he had had a proper school education. He was an officer of course, a Captain Gallimore; and my girl's

Mrs. Gallimore. Now they've wired that he's missing ; and you know what that means. We all know."

And indeed Mr. Bowden looked very knowing. I could swear that, even in his sorrow, he winked.

"Oh, but he may not be dead," ventured the woman.

"Yes, he's dead. He's gone 'ome all right. I wouldn't give you a thank-you for his chances."

By this time those at the bar had heard something of the conversation—Mr. Bowden had seen to that—and the landlord, stimulated to curiosity, called out :

"Not bad news, Tommy. Not bad news, I hope."

All the men's eyes turned towards the sufferer, and the barmaid stared.

"Yes, old boy, I'm afraid so. Thanks very much."

"Well, what is it ?"

Mr. Bowden, finding it difficult to speak, spread a hand. "Tell 'em," he suggested to the woman.

"It's his boy——"

"His son-in-law—reelly," corrected Mr. Bowden.

"He's missin'."

"*And* believed wounded and a prisoner," added Mr. Bowden proudly.

"Missing !" exclaimed the landlord. "I say ! That's bad !" to which Mr. Bowden, feeling very grateful for the remark, nodded a convincing agreement. The thought of its badness made him lift the tips of his fingers up and down on the table-top.

Now one of the men, not without pride in his silent action, came up to the table that he might take the afflicted man's glass and refill it at his own charges. But Mr. Bowden's hand detained him.

"No. . . . No, I don't feel like drinking to-night."

"Oh, yes. Come. It'll do you good." The man took the glass a little way.

"Well . . ." began Mr. Bowden, hesitantly ; and the man, after examining the hesitation, decided to take the glass the full journey to the counter.



"Believed a prisoner, you say, Tommy?" asked the landlord, filling the glass, and taking the money. "Well, there's hope in that."

"But they treat their prisoners shamefully, Eddy; you know that. It's the Turks, you see."

"Turks! My!" The landlord made a grimace: he too found it spicier to believe the worst.

"Yes. And he was wounded when he was took. I only hope they didn't murder him straight out."

"Oh no, no," protested the woman.

"But they do, them Turks. They don't like to be loaded up with a lot of wounded. They've no conveniences for 'em. So they just draw their knives and put 'em out."

"They're ruffians, certainly."

"Yes. Savages—no better."

"Savages," repeated Mr. Bowden, after a sip.

"But they say he's a prisoner," reminded the landlord.

"*Believed*. Only *believed*, Eddy. And, speaking generally, 'believed' in official telegrams means 'we're not having any'—rely."

The landlord nodded.

"It does—sometimes—certainly."

"Of course it does. There's nothing in it—rely."

On which Mr. Bowden finished off the second glass of whisky, a slight windiness in his throat resulting. He retreated his chin to control it. A philosophical attitude seemed the gift of the whisky, and he added:

"Well, if he's dead, he is dead."

"Yes," admitted the woman. "That's the only way to look at matters."

And there was silence, since no one could think of comforting words.

The philosophy became still clearer as the whisky settled.

"And that's all there is to it," said Mr. Bowden.

"Is his wife very much upset?" inquired the woman.

"Aye. You bet."

"Could we do anything to help her?"

"I left her with her mother." (It seemed a beautiful sentence.)

"And had the boy a mother of his own?"

Mr. Bowden stood up—suddenly, clumsily, but with stable results. For the second time that evening a happy idea had come to him. He pulled his bowler forward and buttoned his coat.

"Lord, yes! And, come to think of it, I don't believe she knows yet. I'll go—and tell her now. First, before the noos reaches her in any other way. It'll come best from me."

"Well, good-bye, Tommy," called the landlord. "Like as not, it's quite all right. Goo'-bye."

Mr. Bowden heard no more, for he was out in the street.

## II

It was late when Mr. Bowden arrived at Waldron Avenue. The drink and the self-suggested sorrow had so hazed his mind that the journey was prolonged by two misadventures. His initial mistake had been to mount the first bus in the Fulham Road, without making certain that it would continue in its present direction, and to sit in it cloudily without noticing that it had made a right-angled turn and was carrying him towards the heart of London. Only when the uniformed conductress (now a familiar war-time figure) demanded an additional fare did he wake up to what had happened and stagger, under cover of repeated apologies and smiles, down to the street again. He found himself in High Street, Kensington, which was in exactly the opposite direction to the one he had desired to take.

And in High Street, Kensington, as he waited on the kerb for a Hammersmith bus, it seemed to him that the buses which plied along that road were less likely to stop for a signalling passenger than any others in the kingdom.



He approached several as they passed, and was met by the unintelligent stare of the conductress who watched him walking after her vehicle as it carried her out of sight. A series of these little semicircular walks, however, brought him to a corner where a cluster of people was standing, and keeping in the midst of these, he managed to attain the inside of a bus, thanks largely to the pushfulness of those behind him. He fell into its seat and almost before he had resettled his wits, discovered that he was at Hammersmith.

Luckily there was no difficulty about the Bealing trams, because their lines ran right along Bealing High Street, on their journey to the very outskirts of London. He dropped with an easy mind, therefore, into a corner seat. But this emotional calm allowed the mists to rise again, and he sat there smiling sadly, nor observing when the tram began to carry him to the new districts that had sprung up beyond Bealing. He was, as a matter of fact, indulging very happily in the composition of sympathetic speeches that he would deliver to "old Gallimore." With sentimental nods he resolved that he would remind the proud father of his own declaration that in Stephen's fine soldiering the ancient Gallimore tree had blossomed again—an idea that had appealed strongly to Mr. Bowden. Eyes warming and filling, he fell to repeating it at every jolt of the tram. Sometimes he said, "The old tree blossomed . . ." and sometimes, when the jolt was serious, "The old bloss treesomed . . ." and he was equally touched by either. Poetic vision descended upon him, and he found himself uttering the words, not of the Gallimores alone, but of England.

Though he had been looking out of the window all this time, the truth about his geographical position—because it could work its way into his mind no faster than the daylight conquers the dark—only broke on him at a point two miles west of Bealing. "Crikey!" said he, and got out. That he was not more exasperated was

due to his having attained, what with his drinks and the jolting of the vehicle, to a sort of mystical acceptance of good and ill. He just smiled at the misfortune and mounted an eastward tram. But resolved there should be no more mistakes, he sat sideways in this tram, glued his eyes to the window, watched the journey carefully, and announced aloud to the passengers (for his greater mental grasp) the name of each stopping-place.

"Bealing High Street!" This one he announced triumphantly, and hastened to get down before the tram could start again.

It was a relief to see that there was still a light in the front windows of 33 Waldron Avenue. To have had to drag the old Gallimores out of bed would have heightened the difficulty of his task. Mr. Gallimore opened the door.

"Look here, old boy," exclaimed Mr. Bowden. "I must come in and see you."

"But we're just going to bed."

"You won't want to go to bed when . . ." He paused, wondering if this were the best way to begin, but found that a sentence could sometimes be like a Bealing tram, inasmuch as, having once got into it, you must go on with it along its set lines—at least to the first stop. "You won't want to go to bed, I'm afraid, after you've heard what I have to tell you."

"Well, what is it? What is it?"

"It's—it's noos. Noos we've had to-night. I thought a member of the family ought to break it to you rather than a stranger, so I come all this way."

"But the devil! What is it?"

Mrs. Gallimore had now appeared in the passage, and she asked hurriedly, "It's nothing serious, is it?"

So suddenly did she ask it that Mr. Bowden had no hesitation in replying, "No, nothing serious. Nothing serious."

"Well, why have you taken all this trouble to come?" asked Mr. Gallimore.



"Because it's Stephen, you see . . ."

"Stephen?"

"Yes. . . . So it is serious, relly."

"What's the matter with Stephen?" demanded Mrs. Gallimore.

"Missin'," said Mr. Bowden, proudly. "And believed wounded and killed—I mean wounded and *missin'*."

"Wounded and missing?"

"No. . . . I mean, wounded and a prisoner. That was what it said. Florrie had a wire."

"Not—not dead?"

"No; they don't say so. Wounded and a prisoner was all they said. It *may* be all right. Don't fear the worst till it's necessary. No noos is good noos, as the saying goes."

"Come in. Come in," said Mr. Gallimore.

They went into the lighted room, and Mr. Bowden told his story. Mr. Gallimore, at its close, said nothing. His wife, who was the only one who had sat down, rose to her feet and turned her eyes to the dying fire. "It might be worse. It might be very much worse. . . . Tom dear, what's the time?"

"Twenty to eleven?"

"Do you know, I think I ought to run round to little Florrie. She'll be unhappy and anxious—all alone in that house with nobody but lodgers about. I'll just stay the night with her, and sleep in her bed with her—see?" She put her hand on his sleeve. "You'll be all right. I'll lay your porridge and bacon all ready for you on the gas stove."

"Do you think Stephen is safe?"

"I don't know, dear. I pray that he is."

"How long must we endure the doubt, do you think?"

"Not long. It can't be long now, because the war is ending. Others have endured it for years."

"Yes." Mr. Gallimore lifted his face and dressed his shoulders. "Others have endured it. Yes, somebody

ought to be with Florrie. It was right of you to have thought of it."

"I left her with her mother," said Mr. Bowden.

Mrs. Gallimore turned her eyes to him.

"Did she go home?"

"I don't know."

"Then I'll run round and see. But first I'll get you a cup of tea. It was kind of you to come. And I've got a kettle boiling."

She ran out, and Mr. Bowden stared after her and sat down.

"She takes it well, don't she? Noble, I call it. I like that sort of thing: it gets me, somehow. And between you and me, I don't care for this bit of noos—not at all. I didn't say so before her—but we don't like the look of it—none of us don't."

Mr. Gallimore remained silent and thoughtful; and though Mr. Bowden tried to speak again, the silence conquered him. They were sitting silently together when Mrs. Gallimore returned with a tin tray on which were three cups and a teapot. "Come along," she invited cheerily, "we'll all have a cup." But Mr. Bowden noticed that her eyes and nose were red; and his sympathies, now in a most active state, showed him at once the noble and self-sacrificing step. He drank his tea quickly, wiped his mouth, and stood up.

"I'll leave you to it—see? You won't be wanting me. I'll leave you to it."

\* \* \* \* \*

Ah, Stephen, philosophers have bequeathed their bones to their colleges and scientists their bodies to the laboratories, glad that they can thus score a last point over death and still be of service to their fellows; even so, if truly thou be dead, such wisdom is thine as can smile to see that, down in a world where happiness is not too frequent, the character of thy sharp passing gave to one old man, who was always proud of thee, a very pleasant evening.



## CHAPTER VI

### *Two Others are Proud*

#### I

I WOULD have you realize that Mr. Gallimore's anxiety and brooding during the next weeks were neither feigned nor self-deceiving but genuine things. May I mention that he took to his knees in prayer again, having decided that his agnosticism was not so safely based as to warrant him depriving his boy of the benefit—if any—of a father's prayers? He tried to pray, as another parent for his child, "Lord, I believe; help thou my unbelief." And having once conceded that the old beliefs *might* be true, and that for Stephen's sake he must act on them as if they were, he so far humbled his pride as to return to his old church of St. Philip and St. James's, and not only to its open Matins and Evensong but even to its Holy Communion itself. In his doubting mind he thought that perhaps God might require this *amende* from him. And another reason sent him: in the old days of untroubled faith he had always believed with many simple folk of Anglican congregations, that prayers at the Holy Communion were more likely to be successful than other prayers, and prayers at a very early Holy Communion the most successful of all. So, lest this were the truth—and he was too old and tired now to think out the philosophic arguments against it—he would not go to the Midday Communion, sixty-five though he was, but to the eight o'clock celebration, that Stephen might have the advantage—if any—of his father's early rising. And in his pew at the back he would make a point of kneeling, not just bending forward from a sitting

position, nor even leaning back against the pew's seat, for he feared lest any slackness might lessen the boy's chances. And at the holy moment of Consecration when prayers, if ever, were like to be heard on high, he muttered hard and with tight-closed eyes, "If it be possible, give Stephen back to us, O Lord; nevertheless, not our will but Thine be done. Amen. Amen. . . ."

I tell you all this that, amongst us, there may be no self-righteous contempt for Mr. Gallimore, when we admit frankly that, through it all, he was pleased with his part of the anxious father. He loved the inquiries at the Church door, the solicitations in the market place, the visits of old forgotten friends, and their significant pressing of his hand. "Yes," he would say to one who stopped him in the High Street, "Stephen is my only boy," and thereon he would protrude his lower jaw in an expression of controlled pain; and to another, while his eyes looked up the road to its far end, "The Gallimores come to an end with Stephen, you see. He is the last of the Gallimores." Or he would borrow his wife's remark and deliver it with something of her smile, "Ah, well; others have endured it. And for more sons than one. It's Ruth and little Florrie that I am anxious about. One must carry on, that's all; one must carry on."

"No news, Gallimore?" they would ask as he passed.

And he would shake his head, "Nothing yet."

"Well, no news is good news."

"Perhaps . . . Perhaps . . . ." At which he smiled rather sweetly and nodded.

And look, he had another secret reason for pride. Though it had not been easy to him, who loved romance and alarms and the piquancy which comes with the suspicion of conjugal disloyalties on the part of one's friends, to refrain from telling Ruth of the lady in His Majesty's Theatre, he had uttered no word about her; fifty times he had forced back the words if they came as far as his lips. "No," thought he, "the boy said it



was all right ; and I shall believe in my son. If he said it was all right, it was so. I'm not going to sow suspicion of him in his mother's head. I'm not going to tell tales on Stephen, even to his mother." He was glad, now, that he had kept to that resolve. "Thank God I never disturbed his mother's faith in him," he would mutter to himself aloud as he walked along. "Thank God for that. I was loyal to him."

So let us not be angry that he almost enjoyed his part, and that the make-believe which had accompanied him out of childhood and through his whole life, adding to it an aura of melancholy beauty, was strongly with him now, showing him Robert Gallimore as of the company of Jacob who mourned for Joseph, David who prayed for the life of Bathsheba's son, and Mr. Peggoty who sought for news of Little Em'ly. Let us be satisfied, as Ruth Gallimore, with her all-seeing eyes was satisfied, that along such ways as these—strange and not unlovely ways—does Nature send her compensations for our pain.

## II

If Mr. Bowden in one fashion and Mr. Gallimore in another were proud, Florrie was proud of a few things too. She had been proud that it was to *her*, as Stephen's wife, that the telegram was sent ; she was proud of her rightful throne as the chief mourner ; but she was far prouder of a resolution she had finally built that night when Mrs. Gallimore hurried to her with sympathy and comfort.

Mrs. Gallimore had found the door on the latch, and going on quick, quiet feet into the lighted front room, had seen Florrie sitting with her elbow on a chair's back, as she stared at her thoughts. In a second the girl had run to her mother-in-law, to be caught in a tight hold, while her head dropped on the old dry breast and the sobbing broke. And Mrs. Gallimore had comforted her. "It's all right, darling. . . . It's all right, little one. . . ."

You're lonely, that's all, and fearing the worst. . . . I'm going to stay with you to-night—may I? You shall make room for me in your bed, and we'll sleep together. . . . You mustn't sit here, worrying all night. Think: we may have just had news that Stephen is being kept safe for us. . . .”

But since the girl's head shook in a passionate certainty of denial, Mrs. Gallimore pressed a long kiss on its hair, and stroked it gently, again and again.

“And, dear—listen: if he isn't—if he's really gone from us—I've thought out exactly what we'll do. I thought it out as I walked here. You and little Ruth shall come and live always with me. I shall have a daughter instead of a son; you shall be Stephen to me, and little Ruth shall be Stephen to both of us—eh? I'm a tough old woman, and shall last long years yet. What happiness we shall have together, making little Ruth into a good and happy child and the delight of our lives! See—I am not crying. I can see a happiness both ways, dearest: I can see a great happiness if, in spite of this, Stephen comes back to us; and another happiness, of a different kind—if he does not. . . .”

“But supposing—supposing—Mother, supposing as we stand here talking, Stephen isn't alive. Supposing he's lying dead somewhere.”

Mrs. Gallimore again put her lips to her daughter-in-law's hair, resting them there for a long while as if from the touch she would draw strength to answer.

“Then he looks beautiful as he lies, my little one. I am content to look upon him there.”

\* \* \* \* \*

Later they were sitting side by side, Mrs. Gallimore holding her daughter-in-law's hand, patting it, and saying:

“You've been a good little wife to him, dear—remember that. He knows it. Often he used to say, ‘I think Florrie's wonderful in her way.’ ‘I get so irritable



sometimes,' he said to me once, 'and she's so patient and understanding. She's better than I am, and I'm glad she's Ruth's mother.' "

"I wanted to ask you a lot about Stephen," began Florrie—but abruptly stopped, and let her words filter away into a desert of silence. She had crushed an upswelling desire to tell out the pain of Stephen's infidelity. She had wanted to ask, "If he is alive and comes home again, shall we be able to be happy once more? What ought I to do to rebuild things as they were? You have known him all his life; do you think he will change back to what he was?" But this reminded her that Mrs. Gallimore was Stephen's mother, and the words perished as she thought, "No, it wouldn't be fair to get a little bit of relief for my troubles by destroying his mother's faith in him. . . . I'll go silent to my grave . . ." and she felt glad in this resolution, her make-believe coming to her aid, even as Mr. Gallimore's had done; only it wasn't creating a Biblical figure, or even a Dickensian figure, but one of the heroines of the threepenny romances that Stephen had despised. They were always loyal.

She felt gladder yet, when the true story of Stephen came through.

## CHAPTER VII

### *The Story of Stephen*

#### I

AND here is the full story of Stephen. In that long column which marched out of Hamadan there were few so satisfied as he. His office of Quartermaster enabled him, instead of footing it at the head of his platoon, to ride like a general up and down his line of camels, giving here an order and there a query ; or it afforded scope for gallantry among the Jilu ladies, for at times he would give the fat and footsore old mothers a restful ride on his horse, resolved to fumigate the animal afterwards ; or it sent him riding ahead, with an interpreter from the Russian cavalry at his side, and money bags slung round his back, to the next halting place to buy supplies for the troops. Then it was his pride to have everything ready for the night's camp, when the battalion tramped in wearily.

The Hamadan-Kasvin Road that for many days they would be marching along was a fine one, laid by the Russians in the days before the war, for the better control of this their "sphere of influence." There were large posting stations at so many versts apart ; and it was often under the shadow of these stations that the regiment bivouacked. Usually the column could only cover some thirty versts a day, because of the slowness of the pack-camels and the dragging of the Christian refugees. So Stephen and his interpreter would arrive at the prescribed halt by noon, and spend humorous hours chaffering with a contractor for the local supplies : corn and bhoosa for the horses, and carcasses of young mutton, skins of honey,



and slabs of sangak for the men. As luxuries for the messes he would buy melons, grapes and pears, washing them in a solution of potassium permanganate. For in these conditions the health and fitness of the battalion, thought he, were less the Doctor's responsibility than his own.

And as Quartermaster he would dine apart with the Colonel, the Adjutant and the Doctor, at their table under the stars ; and they would praise him for the good things he had bought. After dinner and a rubber of open-air bridge, he would retire to such a bed as only a Quartermaster's batman can make, under the best tree, where he would listen to the last tinkling of the camel-bells, before dropping asleep. Soon after sunrise the same tinkling awoke him, and he was glad to wake, so full of vigour he seemed, and to lie gazing at the long range of mountains ahead of their march. Beneath the dawn they shone in soft tints that only water-colours could render : white and pink and maroon and the blue of a thrush's egg ; all hues the paler for the dark spires of the poplars in the foreground. Then up and on, for the sun was high, and his horse fresh. The sun lifted and burned hot, and he drew off his jacket, and fixed it in the straps of his saddle-bags, riding thereafter with his shirt open at the throat and the sleeves lifted above the elbow.

At one of the posting stations he found an officer of the Hush Hush Brigade, who was quartered here in solitude with a batman and a telephone.

"Are you their lines of communication?" laughed Stephen.

"That's about it," grinned the man.

"You hold the road?"

"A hundred and fifty miles of it."

"Well, I hope it keeps fine for you. And now, where *are* the Hush Hush? Or perhaps you don't know."

"I don't know—honestly. I send messages forward over those mountains, and they disappear and that's all I know about anything. Rumour is strong that a big

body of them, and Dunsterville himself, are in Russia, helping the Armenians defend Baku against the Turks, and that they are in the deuce of a pickle."

"Why? What's happened?"

The man shrugged his shoulders. Stephen's eyes, at that instant, fell on the walls of the posting-house, and he observed that pictures torn from the *Illustrated London News*, the *Sphere*, and the *Graphic* were pasted at advantageous corners. They were pictures, so his nearer eyes told him, of British long-range guns in action, British motor-tractors drawing huge 16-inch howitzers, British tanks crashing over enemy trenches, or parked in their hundreds behind the line.

"What are *they* for?" asked he.

"Oh, just to put the fear of God into the Persians," said the man. "They're all the artillery Dunsterville's got, but he mounts that much handsomely in every town. It controls a threatening people, you see."

"I can't see any howitzers or tanks climbing the Pushti Khu mountains," suggested Stephen.

"I'm afraid I can't either," agreed the man. "It's only moral artillery, but quite effective. I rely on it here."

"Well, why do you think there's trouble at Baku? What's happened?"

"Seems nobody'll really fight there, except our fellows and a few Russians and Tartars. A hundred or so British and Russians aren't enough to keep out 10,000 Turks. The Armenians and Georgians pack up and go home whenever they like; if there's nothing doing they walk back into Baku for coffee, and if there is anything doing, my word! they run back. . . But it's all rumours."

"Do you know anything for certain?"

"I know that our crowd went *in the direction of* the Caspian Sea, because they had a skirmish with Kuchik Khan, and a hell of a row at Resht, where the Ghurkas got busy with their kukris. The Hampshires were in that dust-up too. But whether they crossed the Caspian



and reached Baku, I don't know. They *may* have done. They may have got beyond Baku."

"They couldn't get beyond Baku, could they, if there are ten thousand Turks investing it."

"Dunsterville can do anything," said the man.

When the battalion marched off the next morning, this lonely officer stood by the side of his moral artillery to watch them go; and as Stephen, who had been cantering on his horse among the lazy camel drivers, was the last to leave, it was to him that the solitary called out the *skheil* of the Caspian Road: "Good-bye. Look out for Kuchik Khan."

There were nine full days of such marching, and by early on the tenth day they sighted the minarets of Kasvin, a town nestling among trees on this side of those Alburz mountains that flank the Caspian Sea; and by noon they were marching through the vineyards that surround its walls, and up to its blue-tiled gates.

## II

"The praise to Allah," said Jim. "On Him be peace."

The battalion had just been quartered on a tilted field, by a park of Ford cars, and Stephen had promptly wandered up to his old messmates, not a little proud that, as a Headquarters officer, he had official information to disclose.

"What for should we praise Allah?" inquired Quaite. "This seems a pretty detestable spot."

"Because," explained Jim, "we're going the next hundred and fifty miles in those cars. This Headquarters officer has just come up and told me. We've got to get to the sea in two days."

"The Caspian?"

"You're bright, dear; considering there's no other sea within a few thousand miles of us."

"How does Gallimore know this?"

"Isn't he a b—— Staff officer? The C.O. has told him."

"Did he tell you anything else, Gallimore?"

"It's Baku, of course."

"Looks as if the Hush Hush had made a hash-hash of it."

"'Tisn't them"; explained Stephen, learnedly, sitting on a camp table to tell his tale. "It's the Armenians who make up the body of the defending army—they're no earthly good. Their one idea is to retire from the trenches and leave the battle to us. They're resting in masses, I believe, preferring to leave the fight to their splendid and gallant allies. The minute the Turk attacks in any force the line'll crumple up, and as the line's only a mile or two from Baku, the town's expected to fall any day—unless we get there to save it."

"Are there *any* Armenians left in the line?"

"Oh yes, quite a few. And some of the others have been persuaded to leave their cafés and go back for a spell. But they'll only stay there while the Turk keeps quiet. Nothing'll induce them to fight seriously—not even though they know the Turks'll massacre them directly they take the town."

"Well, let them massacre 'em," grumbled Quaite.

"You forget the Baku oil wells; and the open road to India; and the fact that if the town's captured the Hush Hush might be captured with it. They've no escape except into the sea."

Jim nodded. "Yes, I think we'd better save the Hush Hush, now we've come so far."

"But supposing they capture us as well as the Hush Hush?" inquired Quaite. "Will they massacre us?"

"Certainly, certainly," said Jim. "What are Turks for?"

Two mornings later Stephen found himself in the last of a fleet of eighty cars that were running out of Kasvin along the Enzeli Road. Technically he was Quartermaster no longer, for Green, the real Quartermaster, had



returned ; besides, he had always stipulated, with his concealed braggart, that as soon as they got near any fighting, he should return to his company ; but to-day he had promised to see some stores on their first stage as far as Menjil. He had a car to himself ; that is to say, there was no one with him except his servant and the turbaned Indian driver. The car ran well till late afternoon, and he was able to lose himself in admiration of the magnificent ravine down which they were dropping from the high tableland to the low sea-line of the Caspian. The road was a winding switchback cut in the northern slope, and the sun, blazing on the red soil of the farther side, had filled with a red reflected light the deep gorge between. In the moister depths were many trees, first hints of the forest country on the Caspian marge, and their trunks were lit with red. His heart began to ache. In such a light should not he and Dorothea be walking ? It was an unearthly radiance, and their love had no place of standing in this world. In such a light the Dantes and Beatrices, the Paolos and Francescas . . . But the car had suddenly stopped. It had been labouring during the last few miles, he recollected now, and they had long ago lost sight of the column ahead.

"What's up ?" he demanded of the Indian.

"Engine verree bad. Engine dam bad." The man dismounted and tinkered under the hood. He straightened his back and sighed. He turned the starting handle virulently, and paused to rearrange his breathing. He turned it again, and stopped, standing quite still, staring down the road, blankly, as if he had attained Nirvana. It was then that Stephen noticed the extraordinary silence in the gorge. Never before had his hearing recorded such a silence. It was, of course, only the silence caught between the ravine sides, but its completeness was so eerie that it made him want to overtake the battalion.

A steep upward slope had stopped the car, and Stephen, looking at its crest, asked :

"If we get her to the top of this incline, she'll run down the other side, I suppose?"

The Indian shook his head. "She go a little way, but stop at next slope. Why go little way? We go nearer Kooshi Khan."

This angered Stephen. "We no care for Kooshi Khan," said he. "Come, we'll try." But the gradient was too steep and the three men were insufficient. Stephen walked sadly to the crest in the hope that the country, there overlooked, might provide the inspiration of which, at present, he was entirely empty. He saw far down the road some Kurdish camel drivers who had halted their caravan and were sitting by the roadside among their grazing animals. Going down, he promised many krans if one or two would come and shove his car to the top of the incline. The whole two dozen or more promptly left the camels, hurried to the car, and scrummed round her, pushing at any prominence of the car or of each other, till at last after much chatter, sing-song, and laughing, she stood on the crest. Then on her own weight she took the long steep slope and some of the upward turn, till she dwindled out, almost at the very spot where a little flat serai stood in a ring of poplars. They jammed on the brakes, and Stephen swore.

It was growing dark, and the road had a precipice beneath one side of it. The Indian looked at the inn, the precipice, and the deepening dark, and said it would certainly be a danger to the Sahib's life to continue; they were still thirty miles from Menjil, and by the time he had repaired the dam bad engine, it would be too dark for such a road. "The car topple over." Stephen was compelled to agree, and the Indian immediately went into the yard of the serai, and had a noisy battle of words and threats and gesticulations with the landlord. As far as the two Englishmen could gather he was threatening the host with the British Raj, if something very good were not provided for the Sahib, the Sahib's servant,



and the Sahib's driver. At the argument's close, which was brilliantly lit with smiling teeth, both combatants approached Stephen, the Indian presenting his new friend. "He is a most respectable man, and he will watch over us ; and I will watch too. He give us excellent chupattie and eggs. I sleep in the yard by side of the car."

"And I shall sleep on the other side," said Stephen. "I think there are too many bugs and camel drivers indoors."

The chupattie and eggs were undoubtedly excellent ; and after the meal, they made up their blankets, Stephen and his servant on one side of the car, and the Indian on the other. The batman looked round at the night and put five rounds in his rifle, before he laid it by his side. Stephen looked to his revolver.

"Nothing will happen," promised the Indian, before disappearing round the bonnet of the car. He seemed to feel responsible for their safety. "Kooshi Khan very far away."

The last thing Stephen remembered before falling asleep was the Moslems chanting their orisons on the roof of the serai. He had been asleep only a little while, when he awoke and tossed restlessly. Perhaps the extraordinary silence in the gorge, now that the dwellers in the serai were quieted, had awakened him ; he noticed that his batman, lying at a little distance, was also restless. Behind his head rose a great wall of cliff, and across the valley a bluff of red soil. Apart from the little inn there was no sign of human habitation. He could not help wondering what would happen if a hundred of Kuchik Khan's bravos, firing a *feu de ioie*, rushed into the dusty yard.

Something infinitely smaller, however, attacked him in that inn yard ; something so small as to be almost microscopic ; but its effects, in the final count, were no less than Kuchik Khan and a hundred of his Jangalis could have wrought. Of a sudden, while thinking, he

felt a sharp prick on the back of his left hand. It was so quick and unexpected and the pricking so prolonged that he flashed his electric torch on the site of the sensation to learn what evil thing might be at work. All he saw was a dappled mosquito.

"Look," said he to the batman, whose attention had been drawn by the lighting of the torch. "That's one of those anopheles gentry, isn't it? One of those who carry malaria."

"Yes," said the batman, unsympathetically.

"Well, damn," said Stephen.

"You'll know in a few days if you've got it, sir," said the batman.

Stephen shot the mosquito into the darkness, and lay down to rest again.

### III

In the morning the car was cajoled into a spasmodic activity, and it junked and thumped as far as Menjil, the road running downhill most of the way. But at Menjil, like a runner who has breasted the tape, it succumbed, and all appearance of life left it. The Indian laboured under the bonnet, as a carpenter tinkers at his bench, while Stephen fumed. The accursed Menjil wind was tearing out of the defile that would lead them down to the Caspian; dust, sand, and stones rushing through the air as in panic before it. All the olive trees bowed their backs to its flagellation, the herd of them looking like patient cattle who have turned their hinder quarters to the storm. He wandered to the bridge which spanned the entrance to the defile, and remembered that it was here that Kuchik Khan and the Gilanis had stood sentinel at the gateway to their forest land. Evidently they had not disturbed the Birminghams when they went through a few hours earlier, for there was no trace of a skirmish. People said Kuckik Khan had taken a severe knock from Dunsterville and was considering the wisdom of becoming



his ally instead of his foe. Almost could Stephen wish that the bold rebel *had* held up the battalion for a few hours, so that the laggard at its tail might have come up too. Now it must reach Enzeli, the Caspian port, to-night, and supposing it took ship and left him to follow at a later day! Damn that car! Was his luck deserting him?

He managed to cover half of his journey that day, and at night bivouacked by the roadside, he and his two men alone in the heart of Kuckik Khan's enclosure. They were not disturbed; and with the morning his spirits rose. Now up, and into Enzeli; and pray God the battalion had failed to find a ship the previous night!

For the last few miles of his run into Enzeli he was on the flat moist country of the Caspian levels, and never was change more sudden from the arid or mountainous East to the green, luscious, rain-soaked West. No more mud huts and flat roofs and thirsty gardens; the sovereign rain had ordered that the roofs were steep-tilted, and tiled or thatched; and that every garden, pasture, or rice-field should seem but a clearing in the forest. Woodland Britain was no different from this, save for the rice and tobacco fields. Exhilaration sparkled in him, as he thus burst into the West again—he who was a child of the West! It was like turning home.

By midday he was crossing a broad common; and lo! the road had reached the sand-dunes and the sea-shore. There, in front of his eyes, looking as illimitable as the Pacific, lay the inland Caspian. Its waves were rolling in and crashing on the beach. Fool that he had been to picture it as a calm and land-ringed lake instead of this vast and boisterous ocean! The car turned sharply along a road by its shore, and ran into Enzeli.

What of the battalion?

The battalion had gone. It had gone to the front without him—him, the lingerer. As he had dreaded, it had been pushed on a ship before its Ford radiators had cooled, and hurried to the collapsing defences of Baku.

Could he follow it at once?

No, he would not get another ship for days.

There was nothing to do but accept his ill-fate and wander about the port of Enzeli. And here, to madden his impatience, were all the evidences that this was the rear of the battle for Baku. In a straggling building, under its red-cross flag and Union Jack, was a large hospital, wounded British soldiers walking about its yard. In the large sheds on the quays a multitude of Armenian refugees from the threatened town herded together: bedraggled women, ragged children, and men in sheepskin jackets and caps of mangy fur. And just before dusk a large ship, black and noisy with its fugitives, steamed slowly into the port. A wounded officer stood on the quayside watching it.

"Look at them," said he, turning to Stephen and pointing to the chattering herd on the incoming ship. "Why aren't they fighting instead of putting the Caspian between them and the Turks? Those are the fellows on whom Dunsterville gambled everything, supposing that any man could be trusted to fight for his home and his women and his town. And here they come."

"Would the Turk really massacre them if he took the town?"

"Yes. Stout fellow! And I'd give him a lift at the job."

"But if they are all ratting like this, who is defending the town?"

"The North Staffords, as far as I can make out. They went through here just before your people. I believe they've already saved the town half a dozen times."

"But one battalion can't hold the whole line."

"Oh, there are a few Armenians and Georgians who haven't scuttled yet. And a few Russians."

"Tell me—I can't understand—who owns Baku? Is it a Russian town or an Armenian town or a Tartar town, or what?"

"Who owns it? The Turk'll own it in a day or two."



"Yes, but *now*?"

"It used to be Russian, till the Revolution; then it was Bolshevik; then it had a private revolution and kicked out the Bolshevik; and now it's governed by five Dictators—Armenians, I think. At any rate, the Armenians are the body of the populace."

"Five Dictators? What are they for?"

"They exist to be dictated to by five thousand revolutionary committees. If the Turks attack, all these committees go into committee to decide the methods of defence, and there are floods of Asiatic eloquence, and grandiose resolutions about shedding the last drop of blood. The battle is generally over before the perorations are, and the Turk a mile or two nearer the town; so they go into committee again to decide what's to be done now."

"A Fred Karno show," laughed Stephen.

"Yes. There's only one resolution they act on extraordinarily quickly, and that's any resolution passed by the Caspian fleet. You see, the sailors back their resolutions with a gun or two trained on the town. So it's acted on promptly."

"The fleet! I didn't know that Baku had a fleet."

"There are three little gunboats, that's all. They can afford to be firm in their resolution that the town shall be defended, because they're not in it. They're safe at sea."

"Tell me: what ships has Dunsterville got, and how did he get them, with everybody hostile to him here?"

"How does Dunsterville do anything? Borrowed them for a joy-ride, I expect, and then sat tight. He's got three—the *Kruger*, the *Kursk*, and the *Abo*—and the joke is they are some of the best passenger ships on the Caspian. As long as he's got ships he can at least have a hope of extricating you people, if the town falls."

"But the gunboats. Supposing they don't agree to our evacuating?"

"Oh, the gunboats. If they turn nasty, they'll pass a resolution and things'll be quite sticky."

"I should think Dunsterville'd ram them with his passenger ships—head on," laughed Stephen.

"No, he's too sympathetic and fair to the Armenian for that. That's what most of us'd love to do, but he's less crude. He'll outmanœuvre the gunboats—somehow."

## IV

Not for three days did Stephen get a ship—the *Kursk*, that was carrying a crowd of Worcesters and enormous piles of water-melons to the beleaguered town. The voyage took a night and a day, and it was early in the afternoon, just as they were beginning to see the sun reflected from the windows of Baku, like daylight flashes from light-houses, that he suddenly shivered all over his body. At first he did not mind this shiver; there was something almost pleasant about it. But it came again and again, and at last shook him so violently that he was frightened. What could it be? An ache had filled the small of his back, his thighs and knees, and an urgent desire overcame him to lie supine. Throwing down some blankets on the deck, he stretched his length upon them. The shiver rushed up him as he lay there; and with a sick foreboding, he knew what it was: it was the *rigor* before malaria.

"Oh, it can't be, it can't be!" he protested to himself. "Here we are at the very entrance to the fight, and a cowardly fate knocks me down sick. Oh, it's too cruel! It'll look as though I funk'd. To go sick immediately you get in range of the guns—they're bound to say I was malingering. And this after dropping behind the battalion! Oh, it's too well-timed. God, it's too well-timed."

In his despair he leapt up to a standing position. The shiver immediately shook him for his presumptuousness, and made him bend double; but he forced himself straight, and buttoned up his British Warm. He looked



ahead. All on deck were looking ahead, because they were close to Baku now. To his surprise, for in his thoughtlessness he had expected some ramshackle Eastern town, he saw a great city rising on the hills and spreading far along the flats on the shore ; a city of tall buildings, fine residences, large warehouses, and good churches. It would have seemed entirely a city of the West, had it not been for the semi-oriental spire of the Russian Cathedral in the background, and on a nearer hill a little village of Tartar huts and towers huddled on the town's lap, like a fantastic Eastern dwarf on the knees of a well-dressed European lady. Oil, the founder of this prosperous congregation and the real master of its destinies, signalled its sovereignty to the approaching ship : forests of its gaunt black derricks stood on the wastes to left and right of the city, and wide films of oil, gay with prismatic colours, came floating over the waves to greet the visitor.

" 'Tain't Bake-you, it's Blackpool." Two soldiers were talking near to Stephen.

" Wait. Aren't they firin' ? "

" Yes. I can hear small-arm fire. I don't hear no artillery."

" They haven't got much—either side."

" But the place has been shelled some. Look at that building there. It's gutted."

" That was done when the Tartars had a row with the Armenians, you bet. They burn each other's quarters then."

" I suppose it ain't the 'ealth resort it looks."

" Of course it isn't. Look, even the oil's evacuating."

" It's going over t' Enzeli, I expect."

" Wish I were going with it."

Disembarking at the Dunsterforce wharf, Stephen could have cried that in this moment when at last he was standing in the town he had come to save, when he could hear on the hills the rumble of a dilatory battle,

when a shell, most patently addressed to the visitor's wharf, exploded in the sea, he could have thoughts for little but the ache that filled his forehead and the pain and tremor in his limbs. On the instructions of a Landing Officer, he walked torpidly down the jetty, and along wide cobbled roads, and up a steep main street—a street of majestic buildings: fine schools, big shops, and massive blocks of flats where the oil merchants had lived.

It was in a school building, a huge empty *gymnasium*, near the top of the street, that he found the Colonel, the Quartermaster, and the kit and stores of the Birminghams. It was the battalion's base; but all the combatants had been hurried up to the line three days before. The mess in this palatial Dump was a big, echoing classroom, where the blackboard and some of the desks had been pushed against the walls.

Stephen could eat nothing during dinner, and the Colonel looked at him more than once.

"Hell! Does he think I'm looking green? Does he imagine I'm afraid?"

The thought throbbed behind the ache in his brow. But he hesitated to explain that he was ill. At such a juncture the words "go sick" sounded synonymous with "malingering" and "desert." Perhaps—perhaps a night's rest would work a miracle.

But that night was a night of restlessness such as he had never known. He could not stay lying down because of the imperious ache in his back, and no sooner had he got up and walked about the long corridors of the school than aches and shivers drove him to warmth and recumbence again. By daylight he knew that he must tell the Colonel. He dressed and did so.

"It's the devil, sir. I've got something. I feel like nothing on earth."

"You look like nothing on earth, my boy."

"Oh but, sir, do you think they'll believe I didn't want to go sick just now? Honestly I didn't. I can't



bear the thought of retiring to hospital directly I'm ordered up to the line. I've never been so near crying since I was five years old."

"That's all right ; that's all right," assured the Colonel, gently. "Nobody's likely to think anything of the sort."

"I wish I thought so, sir. But the other officers who haven't seen that it was real? And the *men*. They'll talk."

"No, no, they won't. See, that blooming palace next door has been fitted up as a hospital by the 1st Field Ambulance. Best go at once. Can you walk there?"

"Yes, sir. . . . And I'll be up in the line with you as soon as possible. I swear I will."

"The line! The line'll be in smithereens at any moment. We're more likely to join you than you to join us." He laughed gaily. "It's the damn sickest line *I've* ever struck. Its white corpuscles—to wit, the Armenians—are so much more numerous than the red, which I need hardly say are us."

White corpuscles. Stephen, walking to the great building next door over which flew the Red Cross and Union Jack, dreaded lest this apt metaphor should be applied to him. One of the battalion's white corpuscles. The Colonel had assured him that nothing of the sort would be said, but was he only humouring a sick man? The men *must* say this of their officer: it was the obvious thing to say.

At the hospital, the M.O. who was conducting Sick Parade took his temperature.

"105! Yo-ho! Get into bed at once."

# V

For seven days he lay in the hospital, listening to the rifle fire on the hills and the occasional explosion of a shell in the town. But the town didn't fall. Rumours came that as fast as the Armenians and other local troops broke under attack, the North Staffords or the Worcesters,

or his own people retrieved the position. The little British Brigade was covering itself with glory, said the rumours. Oh, God grant that the line would hold out till he recovered. Give him a day in the battle, and, God helping him, he would show them if he was afraid. Without hesitation, nay, with delight, he would get killed showing them.

On the third day four of his brother officers were brought down wounded, and one of them was Jim. Jim's face was bound up, the shot having penetrated his cheek under the right eye. But he was full of good spirits, overjoyed with the battle, overjoyed that he had managed to fight before the War ended, and, better still, to get wounded as all honourable men had done, at least once in the World War. He insisted on being put into a bed next to Stephen, and spent half a night describing the parlous state of the line on the hills, while Stephen, all the time, was far more anxious to hear details about the parlous state of his reputation. Jim, not grasping what he was worrying about, answered his queries with "Good gracious, no! What a damn silly idea!" and was ready to forget the subject. But Stephen swung him back to it.

"I don't believe you, Jim. I should suspect the worst of a man who went sick at the critical moment. . . . Oh, that dirty little mosquito! To think that his pin-prick should have worked all this, and quite possibly tarnished my name for ever! Supposing there were talk of my having malingered, and it were to reach my father! He's very proud of the family name."

He was discharged on the thirteenth of September. Feeling wonderfully well, except for a weakness in his legs, he hurried over to the school building, and demanded that he might go up to his company at once. But Green, the Quartermaster, said it was impossible. Not till to-morrow. "The rations and ammunition have already gone up, and it's quite impossible to send a guide with you to-night. You can go with the milk to-morrow."



"All right, I suppose I can wait. Heaven be praised that the line's held out long enough. I'll get my batman to call me early. Six-thirty, did you say?"

"Six-thirty 'll do."

He went happily to bed, his brain alight with excitement at the thought that in a very few hours he would be in the fire-trenches and displaying before the men of his company such a reckless gallantry as they had never seen before. A murmur of desultory battle coming through the night set him picturing that long zig-zag switchbacking line of trenches on the hills around Baku, and the long companies of undisciplined Armenians, Tartars, Georgians and Russians which manned them, with here and there a unit of disciplined British to stiffen so tremulous a line. He saw them under the night sky; and over the valleys, perhaps, the sparking of the Turkish rifles and machine-guns, or the occasional broad flash from their meagre artillery. He arranged skirmishes for the morrow in which he played the part of a hot, fearless leader. And saying "Six-thirty, six-thirty, six-thirty" to make sure that he awoke in time, he melted into sleep.

What was this pushing at his shoulder? Who was trying to wake him? It could not be six-thirty yet. Opening his eyes he saw the twilight of dawn in the room, and Green—not his batman—Green, in pyjamas and bare feet, pushing brutally at his shoulder to arouse him.

"What's up?"

"Get up, Steve. Get up at once and shove on any old clothes. The Turks are practically in the town."

"In the town!"

"Yes, it's all over bar—well, bar some killing, I suppose."

## VI

Stephen leapt out of bed and seized his clothes. In his haste he began to put on the uniform of khaki drill

that he had been wearing during the hot months. But he stopped. "No, if I'm taken prisoner, I shall need a warm suit in the draughty gaols of Constantinople." And he tore out of his valise a suit of whipcord. He hurried it on with excited fingers, buckled on his Sam Browne belt, and primed his revolver. In his pack he stowed some shirts, handkerchiefs, and stockings.

"I wonder if I shall wear them, or some damned Turk," he thought.

He walked across the corridor into a front room where Green and some other officers were waiting. Now, for the first time, he perceived that the twilight had yielded to the pink light of dawn, and that the air was filled with a rifle-fire so close on their left that it sounded like a forest crackling in flames.

"Look out of the window," were Green's first words.

Stephen looked. Down the steep street from its summit on the left the Armenian soldiers were running—running, probably, none knew whither or why. Possibly each was running lest the men running behind should run faster than he and leave him hindmost. A few came tearing down in carts, whipping up their scranny horses. One or two drew donkeys, on which were thrown and bumped their wounded, sackwise. Now and then came a motor lorry, a madman at its wheel, driving down the centre of the road as imperiously as a London fire-engine. At a cross-roads just below the school-windows a few Russian officers were standing with drawn swords, trying to stem the torrent. But there was a conscious futility about their shoutings and their brandishings: the unheeding stream flowed past and round them—men, carts, donkeys, lorries.

"There go our gallant defenders," said Green, who had come up to share Stephen's interest.

"What's happened?"

"The Turk attacked on the left at four o'clock this morning, at the strongest point in the whole line, where,



accordingly, we'd left only Armenians. These are the Armenians."

"But where are they going?"

"God knows. They don't. If they turn to the right they'll run into the sea; if they turn left or go straight on, they'll reach the Turks again, which is the last thing they want. This is what panic is, my son. Ever seen it before?"

"Where are the Turks? Are they behind?"

"Obviously. But I don't suppose they can run as fast as Armenians. No gentleman can."

"They should be on us at any moment, then?"

"I imagine so. There must be a hairy old breach in the line."

"Well, what do we do?"

"Dunno."

Just then they saw a British soldier hurrying up the hill from the Hotel Metropole at its bottom. As the Metropole was British Headquarters, it seemed likely he was a runner with orders. His race up the hill, in and out of the stream of Armenians, now pushing them off with his hands, now charging them out of his path, was like the race of a Rugby three-quarter with the ball. He shot into the school-yard, and all those in Stephen's room turned towards the door to wait his entry. In a few seconds he was standing before them, breathless, and handing a message to Green. The others at once rushed to Green's shoulder and looked over it.

"To O.C. School. If necessary, hold building to the last man."

"H'm," muttered Stephen. "Dramatic enough for anybody."

"Who's O.C.?" asked Green. "Who's the senior of us? Are you?"

A wild wish jumped in Stephen's head! There were in the building: Green, Stephen, Marriat, the Transport Officer, Turner, a sick officer just down

from the line, and Gower, a mere child of 19, who had arrived the night before with a small draft of Birmingham details. Of the "Other Ranks," there were the Quartermaster-Sergeant and his men, the Transport Sergeant and four men, the twenty odd details of Gower's draft, two cooks and four officers' batmen.

"Gallimore's senior," said Green.

Stephen's heart inflated; he could have laughed hysterically.

"Yank in Turner and the Gower child, and the two sergeants," he commanded.

In less than a minute the men were in the room.

"Looks as though we'd got to fight somebody, boys," said he cheerily, "but how on earth we're going to hold this great barrack with about forty men—well, ask me another. We'd better begin by calling up the cooks, batmen, transport blokes, and arm 'em all. Some one can show the Quartermaster's boys how a rifle is worked. Fall 'em all in, and look slippy about it."

Green, Marriat, Turner and Gower ran out to fall in the men, the last (being a mere child) with a "Yoicks!" and a cat-call; whistles sounded in the corridors, and voices: "Fall in. Fall in, every one. Get a move on. Get a jeldi on, now"; and all forty men were being paraded in the long corridor, before any of them had completed the buckling of their equipment. Stephen, after glancing quickly up and down their ranks, addressed them; and as he spoke, there floated through his mind dim pictures of Henry V before Agincourt, Queen Elizabeth at Tilbury, Nelson at Trafalgar, and all those who have shown an air before their men and nerved them to battle. "We've got to hold this building, men. . . . What the hell for, don't ask me. Perhaps it's because we're a sort of cover for H.Q. down the road. H.Q. always has to get away, because they're the only people that can save all the rest of our fellows scattered about the line. That seems reasonable, doesn't it? So I



expect we'll have to hold up the whole Turkish Army while they do it. . . . Well, we ought to be able to do that—there are forty of us. . . . However, why we've got to do it, or whether we can, isn't the point. Point is, it's orders. Let's see: I shall put two men in each window. If the Turks reduce the ground floor, we'll hold the floor above. That's how it's done, isn't it, Gower? . . .”

He divided the men into four sections and gave a command each to Green, Turner, Marriat and Gower. By fours the men strolled into the classrooms to man the two large windows in each room. Here, under Stephen's orders, they knocked out the glass from the windows, every pane of it, and sent it crashing in shards and splinters on to the pavement below. This part young Gower enjoyed immensely. Then all rested their rifles on the sills and waited.

Stephen, standing behind his men, had time to analyse his thoughts. Odd that he felt no fear, or hardly any—perhaps there was a hope that, if his end was destined to come to him to-day, it was waiting in the kernel of a bullet and not at the point of a bayonet. He sent quick thoughts to Florrie, and seeing her as a widow, was glad that his last letter had been full of affection. He thought of little Ruth—but turned his thoughts away from her; she would lower his spirits too much, unnerve his arm. He thought of Dorothea, and found himself saying, “Dorothea, I loved you—I loved you. . . .” Then came a stabbing thought that, if they were all scuppered, no one would ever know if he had fought bravely or not. They might say, “Gallimore didn't want to fight, but he was caught by the Turks and had to; and a good job too!” How could he ensure, if die he must, that this story wasn't left behind him?

Armenians were still running down the street. Where could they all come from? Thousands and thousands must have passed. And as he watched and wondered,

a man suddenly pointed down the street and exclaimed, "Look, sir! Look at these 'ere coves. Here comes Bake-you's Last Hope." Stephen looked, and his heart knocked with pride.

Marching *up* the street, and so against the rout of Armenians, came a body of perhaps a hundred men; they marched in good order, four by four, and rifles slung; men of all classes and in all clothes—prosperous men in frock coats and light waistcoats, Russian workmen in their smocks, Tartars in their ragged fur hats and sheep-skin coats, the braver Armenians (natural foes of the Tartars) in similar dress, and street beggars with naked feet. Here a beggar's mangy shoulder touched the neat serge of a wealthy citizen, here a mere boy marched side by side with a greybeard, here a Tartar partnered an Armenian. Some regular Russian officers marched at their head and their rear. And on the pavement walked or ran many of their women, some weeping, some silent.

"Volunteers to man the breach," said Green. "Then there *are* some *men* in Baku."

Stephen watched them up the hill.

"Green, how can those fellows run *down* the street, while those others are walking up it—and the women walking up it too?"

"My dear, Armenians can do anything in that way."

"The Russian officers are splendid enough, aren't they?"

"Yes, and here comes the second line."

Some five hundred paces behind the first group came just such another: a hundred men of all classes, marching in fours with rifles slung; Russian officers leading them, and their women, some with red-cross brassards now, and one with a rifle slung behind her shoulder-blades, trotting anxiously on the pavement at their side.

"Confound it!" murmured Stephen. "It gets one in the throat."

It had got the throat of the British soldiers who were



watching from their twenty windows. They raised a loud cheer, and they shouted jests and songs—perhaps so as not to weep. “Good lads! Give it ’em in the neck. . . . That’s right, lads, don’t you let ’em in, if you can help it. ’Tain’t their town. . . . *We’ll* come and give you a lift in a minit. . . . Put ’em where you can find ’em. . . . Left, Right, Left, Right; pick up your feet, boys. . . . Now then, that there fellow, brace your knees up. . . . Come on, let’s give ’em a song. All together: “Pack all your troubles in your old kit bag, and smile, boys, smile.

What’s the use of worrying? It never was worth while—  
So—

*Pack* all your troubles in your old kit bag, and smile, boys, smile.”

The song swelled into a prolonged cheer which followed the volunteers up the street.

The street emptied after this: there were no more Armenians to come down from the front. All the doors and windows of the large houses were closed and bolted, and the shutters were up in the shops. Occasionally a woman looked out of an upper window. And it seemed amusing when a little dog ran out from under a carter’s arch and looked up the street and down it, before trotting downhill and round the corner that led to the Cathedral. A silence and pause seemed to have settled on the morning.

“Why don’t the Turks come?” asked Stephen. “It won’t take them long to slaughter that lot.”

As if in answer to his question a noise of heavy rifle fire on the right travelled over the silent town.

“That’s on the right,” said Green. “We seem to be creating a diversion somewhere. I expect it’s our boys, or the Staffords, or the Worcesters.”

“Perhaps that’s why the Turk won’t come in. We’re giving him an exaggerated idea of our strength on the hills.”

"Well, if he comes at all, I hope he comes before dark."

Now a shell burst at the bottom of the road, near the Metropole.

"They're shelling H.Q., my hat!"

A few more shells exploded in the town, and there was the roar of a house-wall crashing on to the cobbles. Then silence again. The silence was not broken by anyone in the schoolroom, till Stephen ventured to murmur: "Seems that was their last shell."

"Yes, bayonets now," said Green.

But no bayonets came. Only silence.

So the morning passed. It was disquieting, the way nothing happened. At one o'clock the child Gower came brightly in.

"I say, Gallimore, it's one o'clock. That's my lunch time as a rule."

"Well, have a cigarette."

"But I've got the deuce of an appetite up. Don't you think we might demobilize a cook?"

Stephen said he thought it an extraordinarily sound idea; and told Gower to order the nearest cook to prepare a meal for all in the school. When it was ready, the street being still quiet, he and three of the officers sat down to eat it together. They had bully rissoles, rice from the Enzeli fields, dried figs stewed, and caviare from the Caspian.

"If this is to be our last meal," said Stephen, diving his knife into the circular tin, "I'm glad we had caviare for it." And he ate of the caviare till sated: when he lit up a cigarette and explained, "There, the next thing in my stomach will probably be a Turco bayonet. However . . ."

The others were pulling at their cigarettes in a few moments of pause, before returning to their posts.

"Who's this bloke?" asked Gower, whose face was towards the door.



All swung round, their hearts jumping as they imagined it might be the first of the Turks. But it was a runner from Headquarters, with a message.

"Ah good," exclaimed Stephen; any news or orders being better than none. He read the chit aloud: "O.C. School. Abandon kit and stores, and report to H.Q. with full strength at once."

"What do you make of that, Marriat?"

"I should think it means we're going up to the breach in the line."

"That's what I make of it. But 'abandon kit'—they don't expect any of us'll get back to this building, do they? Well, fall in the men."

The men were withdrawn from the windows and paraded in the corridor.

"They're going to give us a little exercise, men," expounded Stephen. "I shouldn't be surprised if they let us walk as far as the line; so you'd better be ready to fight some one. A few thousand Turks, I expect. Well, we can fight 'em, Allah and all. Right. Form fours. March."

They marched out of the corridor, down some stairs, into the playground at the back of the school, and out through its archway into the deserted street. An old white-bearded caretaker and his wife stood with wistful eyes, watching them go. Stephen, wondering what their fate would be when the Turks came, acknowledged their sad farewells with a salute, for the old man was taking off his hat to each officer as he passed, and the old lady curtsying.

Down at the Metropole a Staff Major, selecting a runner from those waiting in the street, said, "Follow this guide"; and the guide led them—not up the hill to the broken line, but down towards the quays and the ships.

"My hat!" ejaculated Stephen to Green. "Are they going to evacuate us?"

"That's about it," said Green, with ill-suppressed

excitement. "We're to be allowed to live, my lad. This is quite interesting."

And that moment with its sudden change from the strong hint of death to the clear promise of long years of life gave Stephen the measure of his previous despair. He had not known how complete had been his despair: it had been an inhibited thought like the inhibited pain in a cocainized tooth. Now with the assurance of life he found himself looking upon the things of life with new, eager eyes; he was feeling them with a virgin freshness—the calm blue of the Caspian, the grace of the ships at anchor, the light between the horizon and a low indigo cloud, the smell of sea-water, a child standing on the quay, a bandstand and pleasure gardens, and the soft caress of the air.

"It's rather wonderful to live," he thought; and suddenly, "Little Ruth . . . little Ruth . . ."

Meanwhile the guide was leading them unhaltingly towards the ships—he had taken them a hundred yards—and then came a voice calling them from behind—the voice of some one running:

"Hi, you men! Where are you going?"

Stephen turned round, and saw an officer—a staff colonel—hurrying after them.

"We were told to follow this guide."

"Nonsense. . . . All wrong," puffed the Colonel. "There's been a mistake. Halt the men."

Stephen, surprised at his sudden sick disappointment, halted the party.

"It's a mistake," explained the Colonel. "Take 'em back, and hold that building. If necessary, you must hold it to the last man."

"But——"

"There are no b—— 'buts' about it. Take 'em back."

"About turn! Quick march!" shouted Stephen, with unconcealed anger.

The men swung round in a slovenly fashion, picked up their rifles and slung them on their shoulders, grum-



bled a little, joked a little, and began to march in loose order and out of step, back to their building with its promise of death. The Quartermaster-Sergeant turned round to Stephen and said, "Well, sir, I reckon it's sacrificing good lives for nothing, don't you?" and before Stephen could answer, began slanging the men behind for being out of step. "'Ere! Smarten up a bit. You ain't Armenians. . . . And cut that jaw. You didn't join the Army and expect to *live*, didjer?"

They laughed a loud denial, and a blasphemous.

Funny things, the British brands of discipline and courage, thought Stephen, as he walked at the head of his men; rather sullen commodities, but *there*; rather slovenly, but quite reliable. And Green appeared to be thinking the same, for he said with a laugh, "If these poor blighters feel at all like me, they feel like a blind man who's been given a few seconds of sight and then lost it again."

"Yes. . . ." answered Stephen, remotely, and called: "Halt! . . . Yes, they're good lads."

They were back in front of the Metropole; and Stephen deliberated for a few seconds. He had intended to tell Marriat to take the men back to the school while he went into H.Q. and demanded some explanation of these conflicting orders, but he suddenly remembered that the Turks might come down the street and attack the school at any moment, and if battle there was, he mustn't be found lingering in Headquarters. He looked round for some one to send. It was possible that the man sent might be delayed at Headquarters and so escape "the blooming massacre." His eye fell on young Gower.

"Gower, go in and see some one who knows what he's talking about. Get exact information. I'm damned if I'll have these men — about like this."

"Right, sir." The boy shot indoors to this adventure.

"Quick march!" shouted Stephen to the others; and they bent their backs to the hill.

## VII

Gower entered Stephen's room at the school, half an hour later.

"I've seen Dunsterville himself!" cried he, as pleased with this honour as a schoolboy. "He saw me as if I was any old colonel. I might have been his Chief of Staff. He's perfectly quiet and unperturbed, and he told me all about everything. I say, Gallimore, it's *some* story—all this. When the Armenians broke on our left, early this morning, Dunsterville went to their general and said, 'Unless your troops'll fight, I'm not going to keep my men here to be scuppered by the Turks. They've done all the fighting so far; they've saved your town half a dozen times; and their reward's not going to be a surrounding by the Turks. But if you can induce your people to fight, I promise I'll stand by you to the last ditch. The only way to save the town now is by a resolute counter-attack to drive the Turk from the commanding position he's won, and unless you're prepared to help me in this, out of the town we go.' He said, 'You do nothing but retreat; very good, I retreat my men too—back to where we came from.'"

"What happened then?"

"Well, I suppose all the committees went into committee on the subject and there were buckets of oratory and in an hour or two they passed a resolution to fight to the death. That accounts, I imagine, for the bright lads we saw marching up to the line. . . ."

"Yes, but stop. Who held the Turks at bay while the committees delivered their speeches?"

"Who? Need you ask? The North Staffords. But the Worcesters and the Warwicks have been creating useful little diversions too. I think they've given the Turk such knocks that the poor fellow's quite confused and has begun to believe that there must be far more British in the place than his Intelligence told him. At



any rate, Dunsterville can't understand why he doesn't make one mighty drive and walk in. And now hush! Not a word. All's ready for the evacuation. An hour ago it was almost determined on. I suppose that was why that order came to us in error. But Dunsterville swears he'll stand by the Armenians to the last possible minute. They're trying to arrange a counter-attack now, but he hasn't much hope that they'll persuade any troops to undertake it. So if we get another order like the last, we shall know that it's all up, and we'd best get to the ships as well as we can."

"But how *can* we evacuate?" complained Stephen. "The minute we leave the line, the Turk'll rush in and it'll all be over."

"It's worse than that," said Gower cheerily. "Dunsterville says that when all the runaway soldiers in the town see us leaving them to their fate, they'll turn against us, and we shall have to fight our way to the ships. And he says that if we get to the ships, the Dictators are going to order the gunboats to fire on us and prevent us leaving the harbour."

"That'll be fun, as Jim would say," commented Stephen.

The order of evacuation came soon after four o'clock. It was worded as the previous order had been, "Abandon kit and stores, and report to H.Q. at once." Stephen took the pack he had prepared for the Constantinople gaols, and gave a last look at the valise that had been with him throughout his career as an officer. In it were a number of little souvenirs he had brought for Florrie and Ruth and his parents, in the bazaars of India, Mesopotamia and Persia. He left them to the looters of the morrow and marched out of the school.

At the Metropole they were again told to follow a guide, and this time no one called after them to cancel the command. The streets were empty, but there were crowds on the wharfs—crowds of civilians and runaway

soldiers who seemed to be waiting there in the hope that they might get on the ships and escape the impending Turk. They did nothing to harass Stephen's party, but watched them with ugly stares and talked volubly among themselves. Their women were the most hostile, some shaking their fists or spitting. "We're the first to go on the ships," murmured Green. "But they know what's in the wind now." The guide led them on and on to the north end of the quays, till they saw a pier with a British sentry at its shore end and two ships moored to either side of its head. The bridges of these ships were "sand-bagged" with cotton bales off the wharfs to protect them from small-arm fire. "That farther one's the *Kruger*," said the Quartermaster-Sergeant. "We came over in her. It's General Dunsterville's Headquarters ship. The other's the *Kursk*."

The sight of the ships sharply reminded Stephen that in an hour or two he would have to meet on board the officers of his company and his battalion—and that he had not yet fought. Extraordinary how the battle persisted in eluding him! "I hung behind the battalion as it went up towards the line; I went sick directly I got in the gun's range; and now I'm the first to hurry into safety on a ship. Green and Gower may tell the others that I did something to inspire the men in the school and showed no fear, but that hasn't balanced things out yet. I've not done enough yet. I've not done enough."

They were now ascending the gangway to the *Kruger*. Except for the Headquarters Officers and their orderlies, and the Russian sailors, the ship seemed empty. As they arrived on the deck a general officer, grey-moustached, broad-shouldered, above middle height, with kindly eyes set in a network of humorous lines, and clad in a loose uniform and Russian boots, framed himself in the doorway of the saloon.

Gower rushed back to Stephen. "That's him, Galli-



more. That's Dunsterville." It was the note of a new boy indicating the Captain of the First Eleven.

"Come on, you fellows," said Dunsterville. "Come and have some tea, or a spot of whisky. You've had a rotten day. Ah, it's young Gower. Come in, boy."

"He remembers your name, and he's only seen me once," pointed out Gower. "And he's calm, isn't he?"

They followed Dunsterville into the saloon, and he ordered a steward to supply them with drinks. More heed he could not give them, for, this being the only saloon on the *Kruger*, it was his Staff Office, and he turned at once to the papers and maps on the table, and to the staff officers standing or sitting around. Gower stared over his whisky at this picture of General Headquarters in a battle, and Stephen listened with heightening interest to the debate of the officers.

They were discussing whether the battalions on the hills, who were to abandon their positions at dark, could reach the ships in safety. "The Turk'll be a damned fool if he lets them walk comfortably away," said one. "He let them do it at Gallipoli," said another. "He's tired," reminded Dunsterville. "We've fought him for thirteen hours, and tired him out. If you listen, there's no firing now. It's a good sign, that. If he's fool enough to take a rest during the dark, we shall slip away. To tell the truth I'm more afraid of the Baku citizens and their gunboats. But if we pass the citizens, we shall pass the gunboats." His eyes twinkled. "I think we shall pass the gunboats."

He had hardly said this before a Colonel entered the saloon; and from his urgent talk, Stephen gathered that he was in command of the *Armenian*, the little ship at the Arsenal jetty that was to get the ammunition and guns away; that he was experiencing a mutiny among his Russian sailors, who refused to take the ship out; and that, at the same time, his pier was being stormed by the Baku citizens and soldiers. "There are only about half

a dozen of us, but it's been enough so far," he laughed. "Still, we've an enemy on two fronts."

Dunsterville nodded. "We must defend both piers. Some one'll have to hold them against the enemy if he comes, and against our friends if he doesn't. We want a brave Horatius to hold the bridge. 'In yon straight path a thousand can well be held by few.' But it won't be a nice job."

"We'd better find some heroes who'll be prepared to be left behind," proffered a Major.

"I'm not leaving anyone behind if I can help it," mused Dunsterville. "But they might have a ticklish business fighting a rearguard action up the pier."

"Why not call for volunteers?" asked the Major.

It was Stephen's word. "Fate made me overhear that," thought he. "If I don't take this chance, I shall be given no other. Dunsterville is an approachable person. I'll ask him at once before anyone else can—before they call for volunteers."

He came near to the table, just as Dunsterville promised the Colonel, "Right, I'll send you a picket at once."

The Colonel left, and the chief's eye, which was looking worried, fell upon Stephen.

"Yes?" he asked.

Stephen would have preferred that the other officers had not been present, but, dreading lest he missed his opportunity, he drove through his diffidence and made his request.

"You want to volunteer to hold the jetties," interrupted Dunsterville, with the volunteer, like the Armenian orators, was getting a little wordy.

"Yes, sir."

"Why? Are you tired of life?"

"No, sir, but——" and Stephen, stuttering and blushing because he saw the colonels and majors listening, explained that the officers from the battalions would be tired out, whereas he had had no fighting; and (with



a laugh) that he had been sick for the last week and it was time he did something useful.

"But weren't you in command of the force holding the school?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, you had all the anxiety of that. One of your juniors had better take on this job."

"Isn't it the senior's privilege, sir, to have the first refusal of it?" asked Stephen, with a smile.

Dunsterville looked at him.

"You sound as though you were very new out. The rest of us, you know, gave up heroism after the first few months. We do what we're told, I trust; and we hope it's not going to be anything dangerous. You've not been out long?"

Stephen told him that so far he had missed the battles.

"Do you know anything about a Lewis gun?"

"I went through the usual Lewis gun course in England."

"Well, that's good. Yes, we might do worse. Stand aside a minute."

There was discussion in lowered voices among the officers, and then Dunsterville rose and walked out to the deck, calling Stephen to follow him. Leaning easily against the rail, he pointed through the falling dark to the positions the pickets must hold. At the foot of each pier Stephen was to build a gun-position of sandbags or cotton bales. He was to be as little provocative as possible. "I expect you've heard nothing but evil of the Armenians," said the General, gazing at the town; "but it's all rather easy and cheap abuse. A great many of them *are* treacherous and cowardly, of course, but not all—not by any means all. During the last few weeks I've had dealings with some very brave and very loyal men. . . . And even if the great majority of them are sneaks, it's not their fault. They've been bullied by the Turk for centuries—and it's like a child: if he's had

nothing but bullying and blows all his life he invariably grows up into a sneak. . . . It's hardly his fault. . . . Still, if the Baku soldiery *do* try to rush the ships, you must—you must use your discretion and your rifles. But"—he smiled—"temper them with understanding. . . . If the Turk comes, fight. You must fight him and hold the approaches to the ships even if we have to slip away without you."

Stephen nodded. And Dunsterville pursued: "Not that I think that anything so unpleasant is likely. Only the Turk attacking in great force could oblige us to do that, and somehow I don't think the Turk is coming to-night. He's a lazy and indifferent fellow, and he's not particularly interested in capturing or slaughtering us, so long as he's sure of a good meal of Armenians to-morrow. But should the worst happen and we be unable to extricate you, surrender to him. The Turk is a gentleman—except when he sees an Armenian."

Stephen again nodded his understanding. "My plans are these," continued Dunsterville: "directly I've got all troops on board and am ready to put out, I shall lower my three lights. That will be the signal for the *Armenian*, Colonel Rawlinson's ammunition ship, to move too; it will also be the signal for you to go aboard; withdraw yourself and your picket at the Arsenal pier on to the *Armenian*—they'll need you to help coerce the crew; instruct your picket on this pier to hurry aboard the *Kruger*. I shall wait for them all. . . . Do you understand everything?"

"I understand, sir."

## VIII

Stephen hurried inside to resume his equipment, while outside a sergeant paraded the men who would form his party. Their preparation would take a little time, and it came to him that he should pencil a letter to Florrie. Yes, to Florrie, though the figure of Dorothea was also



in his mind. But Dorothea knew that he had loved her, whereas Florrie had the memory of that last parting—a pain that must be finally allayed. Shyly, in a corner of the alley-way, lest anyone should detect what he was doing, he wrote on a sheet of his officer's note-book :

DEAREST FLORRIE,—

I am just off to do a job that may or may not be nasty. I am only writing this in the unlikely chance of my being killed. If that happens I want you to know that I am thinking of you and little Ruth, and that, the more I remember you, the more I see what a perfect wife you have been. I feel extraordinarily happy to think that, if I fall, little Ruth will have such a mother as you to make the best thing possible of her, and that she will grow up to care for you as you deserve to be cared for. This is very hasty, and I could say much more if I had time. Very much love.

STEPHEN.

A great pleasure swelled in him as he pushed this letter into an O.H.M.S. envelope, addressed it, and entrusted it to a friendly young orderly. Then he walked outside and saw Gower staring at the little parade of men.

"What's this crush for?" asked the boy.

"I've volunteered to hold the piers," explained Stephen, for it was necessary, he felt, that if he never came back, his brother officers should know that he had volunteered for the task and not been detailed to it.

"What a damn silly thing to do!"

"Yes, it was, wasn't it?"

"Still, I hope it keeps fine for you. . . . There'll probably be no fight."

"I rather hope there will."

"Well, there's no accounting for tastes. Good luck."

As he marched the men towards the gangway he passed Green, who asked, "Where the devil are you taking that lot?"

"I've just volunteered to hold the piers."

"Oh, yes. I heard somebody would have to volunteer."

"I thought I was the obvious one to do it."

"Don't see why—quite. However, don't do anything dangerous."

"*Ach, nitchevo*," shrugged Stephen.

"Well, *kalinychta*, old sport. *Duz-ve-dine-ear*."

And Stephen, passing down the gangway, thought: "Good. Now they must all know." His letter to Florrie and his rehabilitation of his name were two centres of spreading pleasure in his mind; and he walked exultantly along the pier to whatever of battle might await him at the foot. A large and noisy crowd had gathered near the single sentry, who was standing there as if he noticed nothing extraordinary anywhere, but they had made no attempt to rush towards the ships, as they had done at the Arsenal pier; they probably knew that there were many fully armed troops on the *Kruger* and very few on the *Armenian*. Stephen detailed a half of his men to making a gun-position, and marched the rest the five hundred yards to the Arsenal pier. Here he found a multitude pressing towards the *Armenian's* gangways, and being held off from them by a couple of men with fixed bayonets.

"Halt!" ordered he. "Fix bayonets."

With a splendid clatter the shining knives were clapped into position. This being, beyond question, one of the most stirring bits of music in the world, it so far stirred one of the men that he muttered gleefully, "Now we'll let some daylight into the b——s."

"Wait," said Stephen, who was still under the soft glamour of his letter to Florrie and felt a strange gentleness towards all the world. "You'll clear this pier without hurting a single person. Remember it's their town and their pier. Now march!"

The crowd broke before them as they quick-marched to the gangway.



"About turn! Clear the pier!"

Holding their rifles before them with both hands, and calling out genial banter, with a few oaths for high-lights, they pushed the crowd back and back. One Armenian soldier, shouting violently, tried to get his rifle into position, and Stephen immediately fired his revolver into the air, to hint at its vitality. The soldier retired hastily into the thick of the backing crowd. In a few moments the pier was emptied, and the men were busied in making their gun-position. Stephen went aboard the *Armenian* to report.

He was in time to witness a sharp little scene at the entrance to the cabin. An Armenian gentleman in a frock coat, standing before the Colonel, was delivering himself, with pained expressions and many gestures, of a flood of oratory which (thought Stephen, suddenly) so far resembled the naptha wells of his native town that it seemed to be mainly oil and water. He was expounding how deeply grieved was the Government at the withdrawal of their brave allies and the removal of guns from their martyred town, and how they invited the commanders at once to reconsider such disastrous steps.

"Quite impossible," said the Colonel. "To put it frankly, sir: we don't trust our allies."

Then, said the Armenian, it was his duty, his very painful duty, to inform the commander that the Government would be compelled to take what steps it could to stop the retirement of troops.

"Which means?" queried the Colonel.

It meant—but there! he could not believe that such an event would come to pass between loving allies who had fought so heroically side by side—it meant, he imagined, that if he was obliged to take back a refusal, the government would be most regretfully compelled to order their gunboats to—he spread his hands sadly—to resist the passage of their excellencies' ships.

"To fire on them?"

The envoy shrugged helpless shoulders, spread his hands again, and looked as if pained to hear so unpleasant a fact stated with a marked failure of elegance.

"I see," said the Colonel.

There was silence.

"You will fire on us if we attempt to put to sea. That, with all the words cut out, is the substance of your message?"

The Armenian, his hands spread deprecatingly—sadly, and his head sympathetically on one side, implied that it was no desire of his to deliver such a message, but he was in the command of those who sent him.

"Step into the cabin a minute, will you?"

They bent their heads and entered the little cabin, where the Colonel, with a quick movement, put himself between his visitor and the door. Seeing Stephen outside, he ordered, "Mount a sentry on this door at once. I have a prisoner here."

Loud, verbose protestations from the Armenian dwindled on Stephen's ears as he sped in search of a sentry. Returning with an A.S.C. driver, who was all he could find, he heard the Colonel address his captive, "Now, sir, you will unfortunately be unable to take any reply, one way or the other, to your Government. And if your gunboats hit this ship—which, having a lot of ammunition on board, will go up with a perfectly hellish explosion—you and I will have the honour of perishing side by side."

The overflowing dissent of the Armenian was now so strong in flood that it burst the banks of his English and poured abroad in his native language. The Colonel offered to this inundation a futile, "Be assured, sir, I shall release you at the earliest convenient opportunity," and departed, leaving his guest to address the cabin and the sentry, between whom there was nothing to choose for wooden indifference.

Back at the foot of the pier, Stephen found his picket



facing a crowd which was throwing its sullen looks, but not its bodies, on to his glittering bayonets. So obvious was it that these people would never attack the pier that he began to feel conscious of an anti-climax in his thoughts. Nothing was going to happen. There was going to be no fight. He was only a policeman, not a soldier. Too absurd, if you thought clearly, the high-falutin' in his thoughts!

Shots in the distance drew him, revolver in hand, to the picket on the *Kruger's* pier. Here he was surprised to see that the quay was as empty as if the Turks were bombarding it, and that his men were taking cover behind their sandbags. An indignant sergeant explained that some one was firing oblique shots at them from a house over the roadway.

"May we turn the gun on the house, sir, just to put the fear of God into 'em?"

"No. Which house is it?"

"That one there, sir."

Immediately Stephen walked across the open street towards it, knowing that his men behind were saying, "He's a cool one, he is," which was the very music he desired to evoke. Reaching the house door he heard a scampering inside and knew that he would waste time looking for gunmen in that house; his bold visit had been enough to silence their guns.

Back along the quays to his other picket at the *Armenian's* pier. All quiet here, the Lewis gun staring steadily at a crowd which had cracked into talkative fragments and sulky splinters. He waited here, while the darkness thickened to its full tone, and the crowd diminished or divided into more little groups of silent, defeated men. In the silence he could hear the harbour water lapping on the mud.

Again shots near the *Kruger* pier. Hurrying there, he was fortunate enough to find the very man, an Armenian soldier, who was sniping the picket from the safety of

a street corner. He promptly seized the terrified creature and ran him across the road and into the gun-position, saying, amid the laughter of his soldiers, "Here, here ; this won't do, my lad. We're allies, not enemies. You're firing the wrong way. Come in here and help us. There. Now, if the Turks come, you can fight them alongside of us, like the brave man you are." And to his men he said, "I don't think you need take cover any more. They can't very well pot at us, with this lad standing in our midst. He's saved us, like a good ally. I think I'll go out and see if I can collect a few more."

Stephen felt more satisfied. He was silencing the Baku quays without firing a shot ; and surely, by now, he had silenced for ever any murmur that there may have been against his pluck. Pushing his revolver carelessly into its pouch, he began a sentry-go up and down the five hundred yards between his two pickets ; a cigarette at his lips whose glimmer made him a perfect mark for a sniper ; one man (as he saw himself) overawing the Baku populace by the completeness of his contempt.

The concealed swagger of the Gallimores was in full play at last. I am reminded of his father protecting his home-keeping charges during the air-raids on London ; or, better still, of that excellent man, on a night in Sennen Bay, swimming between boat and boat, with forty fathoms of terror beneath him, rather than suffer two strange ladies to doubt his prowess or his pluck. For an interminable hour Stephen walked up and down, his imagination heightened by the thought that at any moment, ere the thought itself was completed, a sniper's bullet might put him out like a candle. To go out . . . to go out for ever . . . to be no more for ever and ever. An ungraspable idea.

In his elevated state he was hardly thinking coherently. Came at last the feet of a long column of men approaching the *Kruger's* pier. It was the first of the battalions. With little heed they passed him and his picket ; and



he watched them disappear into the darkness at the head of the jetty, and heard the noise of their embarkation. Fifty minutes later came the second battalion. These perhaps were his own people, the Birminghams. No—it was the great North Staffords, and how small a battalion they were now ! Their feet drummed past him up the pier. Why were his own people so late ? Had they been caught by the Turks in their retirement ? . . . But in that case there would be the sound of distant rifle-fire ; and there was only silence coming from the hills behind the town.

A messenger arrived from the *Armenian* asking him to report on board at once ; and, hastening there, he learned from the Colonel that an ugly mob of runaway soldiers was forming behind the Arsenal with the intent, he believed, of rushing the ship, capturing it, and putting out to safety themselves. The Colonel had therefore resolved to draw away from the pier, cast anchor in the harbour, and await the lowering of the *Kruger's* lights.

Stephen, remembering his general's orders, withdrew the *Armenian's* picket on to the ship itself, but so far modified his obedience as to go back himself to the *Kruger's* picket, after bidding the *Armenian* “ Bon voyage—look out for Kuchik Khan ” ; it was possible, he thought, that the cheated crowd might address their vindictiveness to his men at this point and, if so, he must be amongst them.

But they never came, because the distant firing, for which he had long been listening, had just started and was crawling nearer. It was not heavy and consistent, but capricious and intermittent, as if but few men were engaged.

“ Stand to ! ” said he, sharply to his men.

The firing continued for some twenty minutes, crawling nearer all the time, till it sounded not a stone's throw from the quays ; his heart beat rapidly, but with excitement, not with fear ; thoughts, happy thoughts chased themselves through his mind—“ Then there *will* be a

fight with a pukka enemy ! Good ! I think I am satisfied whatever happens. Thank God I wrote that letter to Florrie. All is in order now. If I live, it'll be rather wonderful, and if I die, I'm pretty satisfied. I have had much that I wanted out of life ; and if I die, the one thing that was wrong will have put itself right. I shall not fail Florrie and little Ruth in the future, but shall have created for them something of the sort of husband and father I wanted to be. . . . What are they doing now, I wonder ? . . . It must be eleven o'clock ; they are asleep, as I stand in this gun-position peering into the darkness. . . . Strange ! . . . And somewhere Dorothea is asleep. . . ."

Quickened by the advent of danger, he was indulging these vivid pictures, when the firing suddenly ceased, and all was silent again. From his crouching position he straightened himself ; he saw the tall houses with their quiet windows, and the broad road, empty like a city street at midnight ; and once more he was conscious of an anticlimax in his thoughts. Surely after that steady approach of quarrelsome firing, something must come out of the darkness. Could he hear marching men ? Yes, a large body was approaching, quickly, but in good order. These must be his own people. Yes, that was the Colonel at the head. Up the jetty they clattered, and before they were all gone, he stepped out and spoke to a junior officer at the rear of the column.

"Hullo, Hayward."

"Hullo, Gallimore. What the devil are you doing here ?"

"I volunteered to hold the piers if necessary, while the ships got away. Tell me, are the Turks in the town ? What was that firing ?"

"They've begun to move—but not in great numbers. There's no line worth speaking of, now we've left. McKane got in contact with some of them. He's behind with the rearguard."



"Then there's only McKane to come through?"

"He's the last of ours. Have the other battalions got down safely?"

"Yes."

"Then I shouldn't wait for McKane. If he reaches the quays, he'll reach the ship."

"I've got to wait till the *Kruger* lowers her lights."

"Have you? Well, good-bye; I'm falling behind."

He disappeared, and Stephen knew a sudden sense of loneliness. The *Kursk* had already left the pier.

A quarter of an hour,—and then events happened with an inapprehensible swiftness.

The sergeant of the rearguard hurried through with his men, and on being stopped by Stephen, told him breathlessly that Mr. McKane was wounded, but was being helped in by a man, after telling the rest to make good their escape on to the ship. "I see," nodded Stephen, and the sergeant passed on. A man rushed up, saying Mr. McKane could walk no further, and would some one help to carry him?—he had left him not a hundred yards away. Stephen looked at his men to choose one, said suddenly, "I'll go myself," and instructed his sergeant that, immediately the *Kruger's* lights went down, he was to withdraw the men, no matter if he and Mr. McKane were back or not. With his guide he ran along the quay to find McKane. He found him propped up against a wall, very faint, and muttering that he had left three wounded on the ground, but the Turk was a gentleman. Together they carried him towards the jetty. They had not gone a dozen yards when several men rounded a corner of the street and rushed towards them. They were in dirty uniforms, their boots or naked feet wrapped round with rags; and Stephen, looking back, knew at once that they were Turks. Ahead of them was one whose uniform was less dishevelled than his companions'—no doubt an officer. When he saw what Stephen was doing, he stopped, grinned, and

said, "Eengleesh? Eengleesh dam good." The grin widened. "You go. Take seeck man." Such was Stephen's first meeting, after four years' soldiering, with an enemy. He grinned in reply, shouted, "Turk dam good," and hurried on with his burden. At the pier's foot he sent McKane up to the *Kruger* in charge of two men, and commanded the remainder to get ready to go. "The Turks are feeling their way about the town, and others may not be so generous as our last friend. Besides, we had a wounded man then."

"The *Kruger's* lights are coming down," said the sergeant.

"Then run all," said Stephen.

He waited till all were clear, and then walked after them quietly—a last fatal swagger. He had gone a little way—the men were far in front of him—when a shell whistled in, coming from the sea. It exploded on the pier, not ten yards behind him; he felt a fire in his knee and back, and pitched forward.

"Those gun-boats! God! it's got me," he shouted, and the last of the running men heard him and came back.

"Are you hit, sir?"

"Yes . . . Oh yes—and by an Armenian from behind! Ha, and it was meant for the *Kruger*, mark you. . . . God! they can no more shoot than they can fight. . . ."

A second shell whistled towards them and burst in the sea.

"Run, man, run!" cried Stephen. "The *Kruger*'ll go without you. . . . She can't stand there and be sunk. . . . They'll hit her by accident in a minute."

The man put his hands to Stephen's armpits.

"Let me help you up to it, sir."

"No, fool, I can't walk. . . . I'm finished, I think. . . . I . . ."

Now the man was kneeling, and he spoke in a voice as soothing and gentle as a nurse's:



"They're ——s, sir. First class ——s, every one of them."

"No, no ; it's not their fault . . . I suppose he was right . . . it's not their fault."

"I'd sell the lot of 'em, sir, for a bad halfpenny."

"It's not their fault," shouted Stephen. "Confound you ! Can't you understand ?"

And he ducked his head absurdly as a third shell rushed on to the pier : it overthrew the man who fell at Stephen's side.

"Ah, there !" sighed Stephen, in feeble annoyance. "Are you badly hurt ?"

"Not badly, sir. Only a splinter in the leg, I think."

"Good ! Can you walk ?"

"No, sir."

"Perhaps they'll come for us."

"No, sir. The *Kruger's* moving."

Stephen toiled on to an elbow, and saw the shadow of the *Kruger* swinging clear of its moorings.

"Ah," he laughed. "I remember. . . . Of course, I'm supposed to be on the *Armenian*. . . . Golly, they think we're all on board. Never mind . . . we'll surrender. The Turk is a gentleman."

"But the *Kruger*'ll never get out, sir—she'll never get out with the gunboat firing like that."

"Yes, she will !" laughed Stephen, and there was a feverish triumph in his voice. "Dunsterville collared their searchlights long ago . . . took them for the front line. He blinded them all right. . . . They're blind, my lad . . . blind. . . ."

And indeed they heard but one more shot—and that out at sea. A stillness lay on the harbour as complete as the stillness of the affrighted town. Stephen closed his eyes. So far excitement had kept his brain more active than his body ; but now the pain was ascendant, and his body, for the first time, recorded the cold of midnight. Parts of him seemed very cold. He knew that

the man by his side was fumbling for a "First Field Dressing"; and behind his tired lids he saw a picture of himself lying in the darkness on the Baku pier, with a man, who was also injured, trying to dress his wounds. Was it death? Was death but minutes away? . . .

To go out . . . to go out for ever . . . to be no more in touch with the world. . . . To learn the secret. . .

"Oh! . . ."

"Am I hurting you, sir?"

"No. . . . Carry on. . . . Thanks. . . . But what about yourself? Look after yourself too."

Could it be possible that it was only minutes before the end? He opened his eyes to have a look at the world, in case it were his last. He saw nothing but darkness and the shadow of a silent town. But perhaps it was not really dark and silent: perhaps the darkness meant that the world was dying away from his eyes, and the silence that he could hardly hear it any more. And from that human race within it, which he had known and spoken with, the only ambassador was this misty figure at his side. People he had known! Florrie . . . Little Ruth . . . Dorothea. To think that, if this were death, he would never see their actual forms again! He could only create them in memory now, like figures in a dream. . . . Perhaps they never were. . . . He closed his eyes again. . . . Perhaps he had dreamt them all. "Dorothea, you were, were you not?" Florrie and little Ruth were real; yes, the pain in his memories of them made them real and vivid. "But Dorothea . . . Dorothea, you *did* live, did you not, and kiss me?"

Fortunately the pain in his body began to demand all the allegiance his thinking could give; but under it, and through it, two wayward thoughts kept leaping—one, the dominant thought of his life, that it would be rather wonderful to be among the killed and to have fine stories told of him—and the other, a shrugging acceptance of a strange, sad truth: "Florrie's in bed now—it must be



midnight. . . . Little Ruth is in bed too. To think that they are sleeping quietly and know nothing of what is happening to me ! . . . And somewhere—I don't know where—I can't picture her in her room—somewhere Dorothea's asleep. . . .”

The Caspian was silent as a lake ; under a low, stilled sky. Only at the intermittent whip-crack of a rifle, in the streets of the lampless town, did the night start and tremble. On the harbour mud of Baku not a ripple lapped : it was as if her native oil, now left uncared for, had escaped from its wells and spread over the Caspian a film of sleep. The thoughts of Stephen were as stilled.

But out at sea, through the dark of that starless night, four ships ploughed their road, *Kruger*, *Kursk*, *Abo*, and *Armenian*. Their lights were out ; and there was nothing heard in the empty sea around them, except the sough of their own movement through the water. And they went on into a grey light, as, soundlessly, the day came forward to meet them.

## CHAPTER VIII

### *Mr. Gallimore Writes*

#### I

**I**F by now we have learned our Mr. Gallimore properly, we shall be sure that there mixed with his heavy pain, when he was told that Stephen would be seen by him no more, a great pride—perhaps an extravagant pride—in the story of his son's last deeds. Of course he saw the events of that night on the Baku quays in characters much larger than they warranted: he always pictured his Stephen standing at bay while an army assaulted the entrance to the pier; he saw a thousand British sailing into safety, with a Gallimore covering their retreat. If his friends of the Bealing pavements held his hand in silent sympathy, he would look over their heads at this stirring picture and say, "Yes, I always thought Stephen would fight bravely when the time came. It was in his blood, you see," or he would give them his most favoured sentence of all, "He was the last of us. Yes, he was the last of the Gallimores, but never mind: we finished well."

But I sometimes think that if his vision was not true to the facts of Stephen's death, it was true to their essence: the spirit with which Stephen went down the *Kruger's* gangway was the same spirit as sent the old heroes along the ways of death, and the price he paid was the same. He risked death, and took it, rather than fail the aspirations that master the Gallimore mind; and if in our clearer thinking we can see as much of vanity as heroism in the strut of these dictator ambitions, what shall it matter? The same clear thinking will show us that we are all built the same way—that we are all Galli-



mores, we English ; all Gallimores at heart. Let us then be grateful when the opportunity comes for heroism to take command and vanity to be subaltern.

After a long talk with his wife Mr. Gallimore sold out no small fragment of his Longevity stock that he might erect a fine memorial tablet to his son. He hung it on the wall of that church he had once deserted. And because his reading of late had been much occupied with the Greeks and he was much enamoured of the Greek ideals of austerity and compression, he spent long, not unhappy hours shaping an austere, a compressed, a comely epitaph for Stephen. Our first view of him, you may remember, showed us Mr. Gallimore secretly moulding himself on the Roman pattern, and I am glad that, before he passes out of our sight, we shall watch him in his belated, lonely, but eager discovery of the Greeks. It had a happy result. Both because a real grief was stirring his ever fruitful imagination, and because these Greeks at that time chanced to be on guard in his mind, beseeching him to be controlled and austere, he did, in this epitaph, achieve a nearly perfect thing ; so it comes fittingly here, at the close of his story. On a simple marble slab, square and without ornament, he caused to be written in letters of enduring metal :

In grateful and unrepining memory  
of

One who died well, covering the retreat of his friends,  
LIEUTENANT STEPHEN GALLIMORE, M.C.

the only child of Robert and Ruth Gallimore,  
and their high hope.

And below, in smaller letters, came the bare report which had accompanied the announcement of Stephen's posthumous decoration : " For conspicuous gallantry on the night of the Fourteenth of September, 1918, at Baku, in Azerbaijan . . . "

Mr. Gallimore was getting old now, and his brain had

slackened its worries and hungers. It wanted simple, concrete things to dwell upon, and the days of his life began to run on habitual lines. Generally he took the same walk at the same hour—the hour before lunch, when Ruth was busy in the steam of her gas-stove; generally he walked alone, because, you see, he had the artist's shame of being found in examination of his own handiwork, and his walk had become a regular visit to the church, that he might go into its empty stillness and look up at his fine tablet. Gazing at it, he knew a double satisfaction: pride in the record of Stephen's deed, and pride in the word-perfect epitaph (as he held it) that his own good taste had written. Tired after his walk he would sit in a pew and picture the future generations whose thoughts, as they wandered from psalms and lessons and sermons, would stray to these words of the wall and be surely a little moved by them, so giving Stephen a pale immortality and keeping Robert and Ruth Gallimore in memory too.

I say his brain had retired from its worrying about life. And this not alone because it was ageing, but because he had happened quite recently upon a remarkable philosophy. It had always depressed him, you recall, that one of his wife's profiles should be really charming, and the other—well, a shock of disappointment; and now he had suddenly seen that in this she was just a parable of all life. I needn't pursue the ramifications of this philosophy further, but it is an excellent one for us all to bear in mind, whether we are reading the Gallimores' story, or our own. He was exceedingly proud of having traced it down unaided, and would have liked to discuss it with his wife; but that seemed hardly fair. A third reason for retirement from spiritual battling with life (though he would have admitted this to no one) was that he felt completely beaten by the noisy, frivolous, post-war world. It was too brusque an outburst for him to cope with; it dazed and stunned him, and he



sought an easier air in old books and old fashions. He could not understand a world in which the symbol that he had admired above most (except during his short, forgotten excursion into Socialism) was now as sure a laugh on the stage as an allusion to a mother-in-law or to Wigan ; I mean, Queen Victoria. And the Houses of Parliament, why were they second only to the Albert Memorial in the race to be the prime architectural jest of the century ? And Nelson's column, and Landseer's lions : surely Trafalgar Square was a glorious symbol of the might of England. About the Albert Memorial he was clearer ; the Greeks had helped him here ; he did realize, and sadly, that in thinking it the most beautiful monument he had ever seen, he had been vulgar all his life.

Conscious of his failing vitality, he must have been saddened by it, had he not used it as a rich soil for the rearing of fine sentences : sentences that seemed to him, in their humour and resignation, beautiful to handle and to savour. " Yes, my lamp is going out," he would say. " Anno Domini is winning. Besides, I've never been the same man, since Stephen went. Virtue departed from me then ; and the sparkle is dead in the wine. . . . Still, we've had a very fair innings, Ruth and I—haven't we, my dear ? "

He died two winters ago ; and there was little pain in his last illness. When his will was opened, those of us who heard it read and knew him well enough guessed that he had taken an artist's delight in its framing, and had looked eagerly forward, so to say, to this day of its publication. But by the internal evidence we agreed that its composition must be dated earlier than his discovery of the austere Greeks ; and I often wonder that he did not turn back and reconstruct it entirely, after the Greeks taught him how wrong his æsthetic values had been. " All of which I die possessed," he had written, " I leave without reservation whatsoever to my dearly-loved and

devoted wife, the companion and friend of forty years. I pray her to read in this my last grateful thanks for the lifetime of gentle service she has given me. Should she, however, predecease me, I leave all to my son, Lieutenant Stephen Gallimore, with the last blessing of a father to whom he has always been the greatest pride. Should he, however, fall in the service of his country, for which he is now fighting, I leave all to his wife, Florence Gallimore, with the love of one who welcomed her as a daughter."

## II

It was an evening of last year's early autumn, and just before sunset, that Mrs. Gallimore stood in the garden of her tiny cottage and looked down its northward slope to a hollow of grassland and coppices. Florrie came to the door in an apron, and called, "You'd better come in, Mother dear, it's turning cold." But Mrs. Gallimore said it was mild enough for anyone, and she wanted to enjoy the sights and sounds of the country which, at this hour, were always best.

Besides, she was amused at something. A figure was going out of the swing-gate at the garden's foot, and she was watching it with an inchoate smile. It was the old gardener who would come in and help her for an hour while the evenings were long; and something in his back and his walk and the droop of his head was giving her the suspicion that he had this night estimated her intelligence and reckoned it as limited as most women's; for of women, as she knew already, he had the poorest opinion. Her suspicion was perfectly right; he was thinking exactly this about her; and doubtless she had just asked him some very foolish thing.

But now he was gone, and no human figure was visible in the landscape before her. The rays of the low sun, lying like bars at rest upon the earth, lit the haystacks to a bold squareness, and gave their true roundness to



the trunks of the trees, and their full depth to the creepers on a barn-house wall. And listening to the chuff of a distant threshing machine and the *chip-chop* of a labourer hedge-brushing ; and casting her eyes around her garden, and delighting, not only in the dahlias, chrysanthemums, and michaelmas daisies, and the antirrhinums which a burst of late summer had freshened again, but also in the dead and rotting sunflowers which the winds had beaten and the mound of wasted, conquered, or useless growths that the gardener would fire when the rain dried out of them ; admiring alike the abounding creativeness of nature and the grandeur of its unpitying destruction ; accepting alike that its favour must be accorded here, and there withheld, and so praising alike the fertile and the futile ; perceiving, as she had perceived a hundred times before, that the order of things is as high above our petulance as it is too big for our morality, and that our little human justice, which would give rewards to the good and pains to the evil, is a net too narrow to hold the skies ; she let her thanksgiving escape in the prayer she had framed for herself, in an independence of the churches as native as her ignorance of the Greeks, and by the daily use whereof she had stabilized her life for the inflowing, not of perfect happiness, but of inalienable joy : “ O God, Thou art, and I am part of Thee ; help me to live always by the clear spiritual vision, which is Thou in me, telling me that the only self-fulfilment is in self-giving, and that, in Thy eyes, all things whatsoever are beautiful.”



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